CAMBRIDGE
CRITICAL
GUIDES

KIERKEGAARD'S *Fear and Trembling*

A Critical Guide

Edited by
Daniel Conway

KIERKEGAARD'S *FEAR AND TREMBLING*

Written by an international team of contributors, this book offers a fresh set of interpretations of *Fear and Trembling*, which remains Kierkegaard's most influential and popular book. The chapters provide incisive accounts of the psychological and epistemological presuppositions of *Fear and Trembling*; of religious experience and the existential dimension of faith; of Kierkegaard's understanding of the relationship between faith and knowledge; of the purported and real conflicts between ethics and religion; of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the value of hope, trust, love, and other virtues; of Kierkegaard's debts to German idealism and Protestant theology; and of his seminal contributions to the fields of psychology, existential phenomenology, and literary theory. This volume will be of great interest to scholars and upper-level students of Kierkegaard studies, the history of philosophy, theology, and religious studies.

DANIEL CONWAY is Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Texas A&M University. He is the author of many books including *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game* (Cambridge, 1997), *Nietzsche and the Political* (1997), and *Nietzsche's* On the Genealogy of Morals*: A Reader's Guide* (2008). He has also edited and co-edited several volumes including *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* (2002) and *The History of Continental Philosophy, Volume II* (with Alan D. Schrift, 2010).

KIERKEGAARD'S *FEAR AND TREMBLING*

A Critical Guide

EDITED BY

DANIEL CONWAY

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107034617

First published 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Kierkegaard's Fear and trembling : a critical guide / edited by Daniel Conway, Texas A&M University.
pages cm – (Cambridge critical guides)
ISBN 978-1-107-03461-7 (Hardback)
1. Kierkegaard, Søren, 1813-1855. Frygt og bæven. 2. Christianity–Philosophy.
3. Sin–Christianity. I. Conway, Daniel W.
B4373.F793K544 2015
198′.9–dc23
2014017599

ISBN 978-1-107-03461-7 Hardback

Contents

Contributors

CLARE CARLISLE is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy of Religion at King's College London, where she is also Director of the AKC Programme. Her books include *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming* (2005), *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (2010), and *On Habit* (2014).

DANIEL CONWAY is Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Texas A&M University. He is the author of *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game* (1997), *Nietzsche and the Political* (1997), and *Reader's Guide to Nietzsche's* On the Genealogy of Morals (2008). He is the editor of the four-volume series *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* (1998) and the four-volume series *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* (2002). He is also the co-editor of *The History of Continental Philosophy*, Volume II (2010).

JOHN DAVENPORT is Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University. He has published widely on Kierkegaard, topics in moral psychology, existentialism, and philosophy of religion. With Anthony Rudd, he co-edited *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* (2001), which defended the relevance of Kierkegaard's ideas for contemporary debates about virtue and teleological conceptions of selfhood. In addition to published articles on *Either/Or*, the *Concept of Anxiety* and *Stages on Life's Way*, he has recently published three essays on *Fear and Trembling*, faith in the *Postscript*, and Levinas' and Derrida's responses to Kierkegaard's account of Abraham. His new monograph, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From MacIntyre and Frankfurt to Kierkegaard* (2012), defends MacIntyre's narrative approach to practical identity and the stronger conception of narrative selfhood found in Kierkegaard's "Purity of Heart."

C. STEPHEN EVANS is University Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Baylor University and a Professorial Fellow at Australian Catholic University. His most recent books include *God and Moral*

Obligation (2013), *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God* (2010), *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (2009), and *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (2006). Evans co-edited (with Sylvia Walsh) the Cambridge University Press edition of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. He is a past president of the Kierkegaard Society of North America and of the Society of Christian Philosophers.

RICK ANTHONY FURTAK is Associate Professor and Chairperson in the Philosophy Department at Colorado College. His published works include *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity* (2005) and *Rilke's* Sonnets to Orpheus*: A New English Version* (2007), and he recently edited *Kierkegaard's* Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: A Critical Guide* (2010). Most of his writings deal with issues in moral psychology, existential thought, and the project of literary philosophy. He also finds inspiration in ancient Greek and early American philosophers. Currently he is completing a series of poems on mortality and illness, as well as a book about truthfulness in affective experience. During 2014 and 2015, he will be the President of the North American Søren Kierkegaard Society.

ALASTAIR HANNAY is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oslo. He was for many years editor of *Inquiry* and is author of *Mental Images—A Defence* (1971, 2002), *Kierkegaard: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (1982, 1999), *Human Consciousness* (1990), *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (2001), *Kierkegaard and Philosophy: Selected Essays* (2003), and *On the Public* (2005). He has translated several of Kierkegaard's works for Penguin Classics and more recently for Cambridge University Press (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) and Liveright/W.W. Norton (*The Concept of Anxiety*). He is also engaged in the ongoing Princeton critical edition of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Notebooks*.

JEFFREY HANSON is Research Fellow in Philosophy at Australian Catholic University in Melbourne. He is the editor of *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: An Experiment* (2010) and co-editor with Michael R. Kelly of *Michel Henry: The Affects of Thought* (2012).

JACOB HOWLAND is McFarlin Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tulsa. He is the author of *Plato and the Talmud* (2011), *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (2006), *The Paradox of Political Philosophy: Socrates' Philosophic Trial* (1998), and *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy* (1993). He is currently writing a book entitled *Plato's Republic and the Voyage of the Soul*.

SHARON KRISHEK is Assistant Professor at the Philosophy Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She is the author of *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (2009) and *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Love* (in Hebrew, 2011), and has published papers on Kierkegaard in journals such as the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Faith and Philosophy*, and the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*.

JOHN LIPPITT is Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion at the University of Hertfordshire and Honorary Professor of Philosophy at Deakin University. His publications include *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (2000) and the *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling* (2003; second edition under contract). He is editor of *Nietzsche's Futures* (1999) and co-editor of *Nietzsche and the Divine* (with Jim Urpeth, 2000), *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard* (with George Pattison, 2013), and *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self* (with Patrick Stokes, forthcoming 2015). His other interests include the virtues; the relationship between philosophy and theology; and the relevance of philosophy to psychotherapy. His most recent book is *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (2013).

DANA LLOYD is a doctoral student in Religion at Syracuse University. She holds a BA and MA in philosophy, and a degree in Law, from Tel Aviv University.

EDWARD F. MOONEY is retired from the Departments of Religion and Philosophy, Syracuse University, and is Visiting Professor at Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His most recent books are *Excursions with Kierkegaard: Others, Goods, Death, and Final Faith* (2012), and *Lost Intimacy in American Thought: Personal Philosophy from Thoreau to Cavell* (2009). Earlier books include *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral Religious Psychology* (1996) and *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Fear and Trembling* (1991).

ANTHONY RUDD is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at St. Olaf College, Minnesota. He is the author of *Self, Value and Narrative: a Kierkegaardian Approach* (2012), *Expressing the World: Skepticism, Wittgenstein and Heidegger* (2003), and *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (1993).

VANESSA RUMBLE is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, where she is founder and director of the Psychoanalytic Studies

Program. She serves on the editorial board of the new English language critical edition of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Notebooks* published by Princeton University Press. She has published articles on Kierkegaard and Scandinavian culture and is writing a book on Kierkegaard and his German predecessors.

Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the generous support provided by the College of Liberal Arts and the Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research at Texas A&M University. I also wish to acknowledge the hospitality of the faculty, staff, and administration of Amherst College, where this project first took shape. I also wish to thank Desirae Embree for her editorial assistance. I gratefully acknowledge the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre for granting me permission to reprint pp. 172–73 in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* vol. 4. Finally, I am pleased to thank Hilary Gaskin and Rosemary Crawley at Cambridge University Press for guiding this manuscript into print.

This book is dedicated with love and gratitude to my three ethical authorities: Claire, Olivia, and Evie.

Abbreviations

Standard abbreviations are employed throughout this volume for the following Kierkegaardian texts. For other editions cited, and for works by other authors, see the bibliography and the footnotes to individual chapters.

In English

CD	*Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1997). Cited by page number.
CUP	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments,'* ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1992). Cited by page number.
EUD	*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1992). Cited by page number.
FT	*Fear and Trembling*, ed. C. Stephen Evans and Sylvia Walsh, trans. Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge University Press, 2006). Cited by page number.*Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1985). *Fear and Trembling,* ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, in *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, in the series *Kierkegaard's Writings* (KW, see below), Volume 6 (Princeton University Press, 1983).
JP	*Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, 7 vols. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967–78). Cited by volume number and entry number.

KJN *Kierkegaard's Journal and Notebooks*, ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse and K. Brian Söderquist, trans. Alastair Hannay *et al.*, projected 11 vols. (Princeton University Press, 2007–). Cited by volume and entry number, and (in some cases) by page number.

KW *Kierkegaard's Writings,* ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong, and Julia Watkin *et al.*, 26 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1978–2000). Cited by volume and page number.

PC *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1991). Cited by page number.

PF *Philosophical Fragments*, and *Johannes Climacus,* in *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1985). Cited by page number.

R *Repetition*, in *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1985). Cited by page number.

SUD *The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1980). Cited by page number.

UDVS *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits,* ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1993). Cited by page number.

WL *Works of Love,* ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1995). Cited by page number.

In Danish

PAP *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. P.A. Heiberg *et al.*, 16 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909–78). Cited by entry number.

SKS *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter,* ed. Niels Jorgen Cappelørn *et al.*, projected 55 vols. (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997–). Cited by volume and page number, and (in some cases) by entry number.

No attempt has been made in this volume to standardize the contributors' references to Johannes *de silentio*, the pseudonymous author and presumed narrator of *Fear and Trembling*. Some contributors prefer his full name (or formal title), while others favor informal, shorthand

references, such as "Johannes," "silentio," "Silentio," or "de silentio." It is the editor's judgment that the resulting variety of references is a natural (and perhaps intended) consequence of Kierkegaard's decision to publish *Fear and Trembling* as a pseudonymous work.

Introduction

Daniel Conway

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813–55) was both a central figure of Golden Age Denmark and a severe critic of its prevailing *ethos*. Although influential today for his diverse contributions to the fields of philosophy, theology, rhetoric, literary theory, and depth psychology, Kierkegaard was widely known in his own day as a provocative social critic. Decrying the deviation of contemporary Christendom from the seminal teachings of the Gospels, he famously resolved to "introduce Christianity into Christendom." Especially in the final years of his life, Kierkegaard was unrelenting in his criticism of the Danish National Church, which, he believed, had fallen captive to the dispirited secularism that had come to pervade late modern European culture. By the time of his death in 1855, his attack on "the People's Church" had made him a controversial and widely misunderstood figure.

Of course, Kierkegaard was also well known to his fellow Danes as a prolific author. Over the span of a relatively short writing career, he produced an impressive corpus, including a series of "upbuilding" Christian discourses published under his own signature and a parallel series of pseudonymous works. This latter series includes the books for which Kierkegaard is currently best known among students and scholars of philosophy, including *Either/Or*, (edited/compiled) by Victor Eremita (1843); *Fear and Trembling*, by Johannes *de silentio* (1843), *Repetition*, by Constantin Constantius (1843); *The Concept of Anxiety*, by Vigilius Haufniensis (1844); *Philosophical Crumbs*, by Johannes Climacus (1844); *Stages On Life's Way*, (edited/compiled) by Hilarius Bolgbinder (1845); *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, by Johannes Climacus (1846); *The Sickness unto Death*, by Anti-Climacus (1849); and *Training in Christianity*, also by Anti-Climacus (1850).

Fear and Trembling (*Frygt og Bæven*) was written and published in 1843 under the pseudonym "Johannes *de silentio*." (Overly fond of *faux* Latinate pseudonyms, Kierkegaard in this case chose a pen name meaning

silent John, *John of silence*, or *John of the realm or order of silence*.[1] Not coincidentally, the theme of *silence* is central to the pseudonym's deliberations in *Fear and Trembling*.) *Fear and Trembling* comprises a sustained meditation on the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, whom Johannes recommends to his readers for urgent reconsideration. His avowed aim in doing so is to mobilize Abraham in the service of his campaign to address the spiritual crisis that afflicts European (or at least Danish) modernity.

Fear and Trembling is advertised in its subtitle as "A Dialectical Lyric." An ominous tone is set by the epigraph from Hamann, wherein the themes of violence, indirect communication, and paternal intrigue are introduced against a disturbingly dark background. Following a witty, polemical "Preface," Johannes launches his "Attunement," in which he surveys four alternative conclusions to the story of the *Akedah*, to which he adds four companion sketches of a mother weaning her infant child. He next delivers a "Eulogy on Abraham," in which he rhapsodizes on the difficulties involved in delivering an encomium worthy of the great Patriarch. Next comes the lengthy section devoted to the three *Problemata*, wherein Johannes endeavors to isolate Abraham in the particularity of his faith.

He begins this section with a "Preliminary Expectoration," and it is here that we meet the famous knights of *infinite resignation* and *faith*, respectively. Johannes' plan in the *Problemata* centers, apparently, on his attempt to understand Abraham as a knight of faith, which requires him in turn to construct a model of heroism that will support this understanding. Rejecting the standard models of heroism available to him, including those of the *aesthetic hero* and the *tragic hero*, Johannes eventually lingers over the model of the *intellectual tragic hero*, of whom he presents Socrates (qua ironist) as exemplary. Might this model be tweaked or developed to accommodate the faith of Abraham? Might we understand Abraham to have been a purveyor of irony?

Before we receive definitive answers to these questions, however, Johannes steers this section of *Fear and Trembling* toward an artless, unsatisfying conclusion. Neglecting to answer the titular question of *Problema* III, he appears to abandon his campaign to isolate the faith of Abraham. When he reappears in the brief "Epilogue" to *Fear and Trembling*, he is once again the voluble social critic whom we recall from the "Preface." Whether or not he has been changed by his meditation on Abraham remains an open question.

[1] Mackey (1986), p. 41.

While Johannes' favored forms of expression can be both daunting and obscure, his main point, most scholars agree, appears to be fairly straightforward: He wishes to unsettle his readers and persuade them to reconsider their understanding of, and relationship to, faith. The proximate target of his polemic is the easy faith that contemporary Christians readily and uncritically claim for themselves. Johannes is particularly concerned to lampoon the breezy sense of entitlement that prompts his contemporaries to regard faith as a routine achievement, preliminary to their pursuit of supposedly loftier aims and ends. Indeed, a recurring theme of *Fear and Trembling* is the alleged aspiration of Johannes' contemporaries, and his ridicule of said aspiration, to "go further" than faith. For them, Johannes disdainfully observes, the attainment of faith is hardly a task at all, much less the task of a lifetime.

So as to disrupt the easy faith of his contemporaries, Johannes endeavors to re-acquaint them with the prodigious and terrifying faith of Abraham, who willingly obeyed his God's command to bind his son Isaac for ritual sacrifice on Mount Moriah. The faith of Abraham is possible, Johannes proposes, only on the basis of a "teleological suspension of the ethical," and only within the compass of a religious sphere of existence that is judged to be *superior* to the more familiar ethical sphere. According to Johannes, Abraham most likely stood in an "absolute relation to the Absolute," on the strength of which he both received and resolved to execute the command to sacrifice Isaac. In fact, Johannes maintains, the acknowledged greatness of Abraham can be located *only* in his decision to honor his religious obligations above, and potentially at the expense of, his ethical obligations. Any other account of Abraham would run the risk of demeaning his faith and reducing him to a status incommensurate with the greatness that is routinely accorded him.

Johannes elaborates his challenge to contemporary Christendom along the following lines: If we admire and revere Abraham, we do so largely on the basis of his willing departure from the established norms and practices that defined the ambit of his ethical life. This departure in turn is traced by Christians to his *faith*, which, Johannes wagers, would have no place in the ethical sphere of contemporary Christendom. We, his readers, thus find ourselves in the difficult position of admiring a patriarchal figure whose signature deeds we would promptly denounce, if called to do so, as those of a scofflaw and murderer. Hence the origin of the dilemma that Johannes repeatedly poses to his readers: Either they affirm the paradox of faith, wherein Abraham elevated himself in his particularity above the ethical universal, or they must renounce him once and for all.

As *Fear and Trembling* is usually interpreted, the transmission of this particular insight is meant to be sufficiently disturbing as to rouse Kierkegaard's readers from the dreary routines of their dispassionate existence.[2] There is much to admire in this general line of interpretation. For example, it goes a long way toward explaining the activity of Johannes within the larger economy of *Fear and Trembling*, and especially his expressions of contempt for his contemporaries. This interpretation boasts the further virtue of assigning to Johannes something like the provocative, exhortatory social role that Kierkegaard claimed for himself in Copenhagen. As a gadfly in his own right, Johannes fits neatly into the office reserved for him by most readers of *Fear and Trembling* – namely, that of Kierkegaard's mouthpiece or proxy. Finally, this interpretation permits us, if we wish, to excuse Kierkegaard for appearing to suborn the extra-ethical violence that is implied by a "teleological suspension of the ethical."[3] As in the case of Johannes, that is, we are invited to think of Kierkegaard as not really intending for us to follow in the extra-ethical footsteps of Abraham. While it may be the case that Kierkegaard and Johannes conspired to "shock" us, they have done so only for our own good.[4] In this respect, they may put us in mind of Socrates, whom they both admired for employing disruptive measures in the service of his efforts to improve his interlocutors.

At the same time, however, this general line of interpretation raises a number of questions. For example, to what *end* do Kierkegaard and Johannes employ their provocative strategy? Are their readers meant to contemplate the faith of the Hebrew patriarch as a model for the faith that might refresh their moribund practice of Christianity? If so, does Kierkegaard mean to suggest that the extra-ethical faith of Abraham and the faith claimed by devout Christians are (or should be) one and the same?

In raising the possibility of a "teleological suspension of the ethical," moreover, does Kierkegaard mean to assert the desirability of a distinctly religious sphere of existence? If so, does he mean thereby to promote, however indirectly, the extra-ethical transgressions that his meditation on Abraham appears to recommend? Or does he mean thereby to confirm the undesirability of this, and perhaps any other, extra-ethical sphere of existence? Indeed, are his readers meant to seek their spiritual renewal in a rejuvenated ethical sphere or beyond the periphery of the ethical sphere?

In short, what *pathos* is the book intended to produce in its readers as they revisit the trial of Abraham? Are Kierkegaard's readers meant to follow

[2] See, for example, Mooney (1991), pp. 87–89; and Green (2011), pp. 151–55, 163–67.
[3] Levinas (1996), pp. 76–77. [4] Green (2011), pp. 153–55.

in Abraham's footsteps and heed the extra-ethical commands they (or others) attribute to unseen deities and supernatural forces? Or are they meant to understand, once and for all, that the tangible, material benefits of the ethical sphere of existence outweigh the spiritual intensity that might be associated with an "absolute relation to the absolute"?

Responding to these and similar questions, scholars have endeavored of late to discern in *Fear and Trembling* the gentler, quieter teachings that its concussive provocations are apparently meant to herald. According to these scholars, the initial "shock" of our confrontation with Abraham soon gives way, or may do so, to nuanced philosophical treatments of a variety of themes.[5] As it turns out, in fact, Kierkegaard and Johannes have a great deal to say on a wide range of topics, including the limits of philosophy, the narrative constitution of selfhood and personal identity, the relationships between and among faith, hope, and love, the competing demands of ethics and religion, the spiritual and social relevance of grace, the nature of sin, the role of religion in contemporary society, and the future of religion in an increasingly secular and cosmopolitan world.

The chapters in this volume are representative of the recent renascence of philosophical interest in *Fear and Trembling*. The collective achievement of the contributors to this volume is the presentation of *Fear and Trembling* as a complex, multi-faceted work, fully befitting the audacity of Kierkegaard's philosophical, psychological, and literary aspirations.

[5] See, for example, Mackey (1986) pp. 63–67; Mooney (1991), pp. 91–100; Mulhall (2001), pp. 380–86; and Green (2011), pp. 167–79.

CHAPTER 1

Homing in on Fear and Trembling

Alastair Hannay

Introduction

Questions posed by the stark cameo of parental sacrifice in *Fear and Trembling* penetrate to the heart of Kierkegaard's writings. Yet to serve as an introduction to these, the work itself must be read through a suitably adjusted lens. To those meeting Kierkegaard here for the first time, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and the attached notion of "suspending the ethical" may simply confirm those once widespread rumors of the Danish writer's irrationalism. Even sympathetic commentators seeking a place for it within a consistent picture of Kierkegaard's thought and works can feel its challenge.

A useful first adjustment is to read *Fear and Trembling* in the context of Kierkegaard's lifelong project of relieving the traditional disciplines of philosophy and theology of their hold on questions of value and morals. If only as a start, it helps to see *Fear and Trembling* as a literary stunt aimed at startling its readers into considering a situation where, in the absence of such traditional backing, we, the readers, are left to answer such questions on our own.

However, that angle needs considerable modification and refinement. This chapter attempts to provide both: first, in the light of the theological and philosophical context that gave Kierkegaard's radical thinking its conceptual form and vocabulary; and second, through consideration of the place of *Fear and Trembling* in the biographical origins of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship. Out of context, discussions of this work tend to puncture the philosophical air with irrelevant and sometimes unanswerable questions. Kierkegaard might agree that genuinely philosophical questions have no definitive answers, but far from implying that they should not trouble us, he would almost certainly insist that this places them all the more squarely on our own doorsteps.

That makes it all the more relevant that the "homing in" undertaken here should bring the reader closer to home in a more literal sense by

linking *Fear and Trembling*'s themes to Kierkegaard's traumatic decision to break off his engagement. Before that, however, a glimpse must be caught of the wider intellectual context within and against which Kierkegaard wrote. Conceptions of the extent of Kierkegaard's opposition to Hegel have been helpfully corrected in recent years, along with a refocusing on Kierkegaard's Danish contemporaries as being the main target of his polemic. Yet they and Kierkegaard shared a background in the latest trends in post-Kantian philosophy from Fichte, through Schleiermacher to Schelling and Hegel, all thinkers in whom Kierkegaard himself was well versed. Thus Hegel, far from being a passing reference in *Fear and Trembling*, appears there as representative of a prevailing view of ethics that takes us to the very core of Kierkegaard's polemic.

Schelling and Hegel

Near the beginning of the first puzzle ("problema") of three discussed in *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes *de silentio* says that the "paradox" of faith is that the individual is "higher" than the universal.[1] But there is no hint of paradox in the morally quite innocent pursuit of our own everyday interests. Nor, when it comes to faith, need any such scruple come to mind with the suggestion that the individual's beliefs take priority over what people generally or currently believe. Traditionally, the terms "particular" and "universal" are used in theoretical rather than practical contexts. In these, universals are simply general concepts under which their particular instances fall. In terms of practice, it is in the special context of moral judgment that the universal traditionally takes precedence. The supremacy of the universal here may have originated in the notion of what was good for the tribe or nation. But in questions of ethics and morality, the universal has been elevated to a position where it is associated with the good of mankind in general. From this are derived notions of equality and reciprocity of the kind traditionally expressed in the Golden Rule, a notion that philosophers influenced by Rousseau and following Kant have reconstructed formally in terms of tests of "universalizability." To find out the

[1] *Fear and Trembling* (hereinafter FT), trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Classics, 1985; hardback edn. 2014), p. 84, Penguin Great Ideas edn., p. 63, page references to the latter hereinafter unprefixed in parentheses. Cf. *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. C. Stephen Evans. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 47, page references hereinafter prefixed in parentheses. *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (hereinafter SKS), ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997–2013), 4, 149.

moral worth of your action, you must subject it to the rule that similar cases be treated similarly. Here the universal most definitely takes precedence over the particular or individual.

Yet philosophers today, partly under the influence of Nietzsche, have freely criticized moral theories of this kind for ignoring what Kant called one's duty to oneself, and which he claimed was a precondition of being able effectively to subject oneself to the Moral Law. Moral philosophers now talk unabashedly of "personal projects" and "agent-centered options," actions that are either unencumbered by that law or else considered to be valid exceptions to it. So far there is no paradox generated. All we have is a widening of the notion of morality to include the moral right of personal development.

To reach paradox we must grasp another notion appealed to by Johannes *de silentio*. In conclusion of his discussion of the third puzzle, the paradox is said to be that the individual be made to stand in an "absolute" relation to the absolute.[2] Unless this is the case, he says, *Fear and Trembling*'s central figure, Abraham, must be considered either a criminal or a lunatic.

The individual's relation to "the absolute" is a central topic of post-Kantian Idealism. To gain a wider perspective on the background against which Kierkegaard directs his criticism of that tradition we must focus on one of its principal assumptions. In its most elemental form it is the axiom that the self-conscious soul is, in each individual, in some way creatively integral to the nature of things. In this tradition, the self-conscious soul is a complex notion that philosophy nowadays in its various manifestations is much inclined to reject. Yet, without it, we can hardly make sense of a great and by no means defunct tradition of thought.

Paradoxically in a weaker sense, or ironically, it was Kant's critical approach to the ambitious assumptions of rationalist philosophy before him that set the scene for German Idealism and more. As against Descartes' idea of the soul as a substance (simple, self-identical, and immediately aware of itself), Kant's four "paralogisms" of pure reason aimed to show that such claims not only exceed what reason can decide, but also misrepresent the limits of what can be said about "selves" on the basis of experience – once the limitations of experience are made clear. Kant's "transcendental idealism," so called by Kant himself, asserts that objects of experience have their spatial, temporal and causal properties

[2] FT, p. 144 (148) (p. 106), SKS 4, 207.

because our minds are so structured that it is with these that our minds themselves generate experience out of an unstructured "manifold."

Absolute Idealism found the confinement of human knowledge to what the mind could make out of the manifold of experience wholly unsatisfactory. It implied that reality in itself lay beyond the scope of human knowledge, something Kierkegaard occasionally refers to as Kant's skepticism. It implied that such knowledge was available only to God. The ambition of Absolute Idealism was to show that once all experience is grasped as an intelligible and conceptually integrated whole, that whole is all the reality there is or could be. One implication is that the knowledge that would be God's is potentially ours. It was an implication that led to different views of the way and extent to which divinity is involved in the process of knowledge.

Absolute Idealism in name has its origin in Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*[3] and in later of his works that engaged the attention of much of intellectual Europe in the early nineteenth century. Its home disciplines were "speculative philosophy" and "speculative theology," each referred to as a science. The former, in a combination of observation and conceptualizing, sought to bring all experience into a coherent whole, while the latter debated the role of divinity in this holistic scheme of things, addressing issues concerning divine attributes, the place of faith, and the role of Scripture. Both sciences were "metaphysical" in the sense that they went beyond the study of spatio-temporal and causal relations in nature, seeking the unity of these through a process of abstract reasoning about the relationship of the conscious subject to the surrounding world. Such reasoning was assumed to have a central role in the actual achievement of what is finally real; in other words, in the creation itself. The questions brought to bear on the reflections of speculative philosophy by speculative *theology*, for its part, would include for instance how much should be left to revelation.

History for Schelling was a series of stages emerging from a Fall which, much like a metaphysical version of the Big Bang, accounts for the presence of sheer diversity. Diversity then seeks unity in its difference, unification being the goal of the continuing development. Humankind is part of the diversity but also party to the unifying process at least in principle. Actual participation requires will or understanding or both. For this a model is found in the ideal of a personal God, a God that is no human invention, but rather, if an invention at all, one that the ground

[3] Schelling (1997).

of all things has itself contrived. Briefly, this ground takes on the shape of personality in order that, through the example thus set, humankind can contribute to a continuing creation that is also its own fulfillment.

Taking a critical approach to his earlier student friend and younger colleague Schelling, and echoing in some ways Kant's earlier critical dissolution of rational metaphysics, Hegel developed a radically different version of spiritual emergence in which the personal God dissolves into the developing world as we find it. It is in the creation itself as it presently stands, which is the way in which humankind has shaped it, that we see the divine will at work.

Kierkegaard, with a personal God integral to his inherited faith, clearly had an antecedent sympathy for Schelling's version. It was while attending Schelling's Berlin lectures in the winter of 1841–42 that he began his pseudonymous authorship by writing a large part of (the second part of) *Either/Or*. The assiduous transcription of the notes taken on that occasion[4] indicate the seriousness of the hopes that Kierkegaard attached to what Schelling had promised would be his "positive" philosophy. According to Schelling, Hegel's philosophy was in its entirety negative, since it failed to place reason in the context of the contingencies of life. It had, in other words, no existential relevance. Hegel had been led to confuse a mere representation of the intellectual form in which God *would* reveal himself were he to do so with the fact of his actually having done so.

We can well imagine Kierkegaard expecting something from a philosopher who could say that "everything remains incomprehensible for man before it has become inward for him, that is, has been led back to just that innermost part of his nature which is for him, as it were, the living witness of all truth."[5] But while Schelling sought in his lectures to show that God does indeed reveal himself, to Kierkegaard's intense disappointment this revelation still failed to connect with the existing individual facing life's contingencies. It was through the history of religious experience, beginning with mythology, and culminating in mysticism and theosophy, that Schelling claimed that the fact and content of revelation were established. Where Hegel had reduced God to the "concept," all that his colleague could offer was yet another departure from selfhood and existence. Toward the end of his Berlin stay, in a letter to his friend Emil Boesen, Kierkegaard

[4] *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* (KJN), ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist (Princeton University Press, 2010), Vol. 3, Notebook 11. Cf. SKS 28, Brev (letter) 85.

[5] Schelling (1967), p. 88.

describes Schelling as "jabbering away endlessly both intensively and extensively."[6]

As noted, in *Fear and Trembling* it is not Schelling but Hegel who represents the universal's absolute priority over the particular. Insofar as the text referred to is *Philosophy of Right*, a work not concerned directly with religion but with civil law, that might seem an odd choice.[7] But we are less surprised when we note that Hegel speaks here of the "self-conscious subject" assuming, on its own authority, the right to regard as a "duty," or a "fine intention," an action that is contrary to the "universal aspect of the will."[8] Here we are at least in the vicinity of *Fear and Trembling*.

A "moral form of evil"

For Hegel, as we now expect, the "universal" in its ethical aspect is embodied in society. Society is itself a "whole," though more concretely so and indeed a good deal closer to life's contingencies than any abstraction such as humankind. Society consists of a political hierarchy that assigns duties according to social function. Being ethical is to be willingly and visibly bound by bonds of obligation based on law and trust. Exceptions to accepted standards of behavior are countenanced only where overriding duties to, say, the state or nation, require some less encompassing responsibility – as to the family – to be set aside. In terms of *Fear and Trembling*'s distinction between knights of faith and tragic heroes, ethical roles are available to those whose responsibilities at a higher level enjoin them tragically to override deeply felt personal or familial attachments. For Hegel, to think of moral insight in terms of the individual simply as such is to sever the individual from the universal altogether; it is law and trust that bring the individual under the universal, the former binding the individual to an impersonal corporate collectivity with a trust born of bonds that originate within the close personal ties of family life. As for religion, although it is "the place where man is always assured of finding a consciousness of the unchangeable," it is for Hegel only a "groundwork which includes the ethical realm in general, and the state's fundamental

[6] Cf. SKS 28, Brev (letter) 86.

[7] See Stewart (2003), p. 316. Johannes *de silentio* is said to be too quick to fault Hegel here, since Hegel's concern in this work is not with religion but with breaches of civil law. Yet not only are the two linked, but the link is also explained in the same section.

[8] Hegel (1971a), p. 94.

nature – the divine will – in particular." The state itself is "the divine will, in the sense that it is mind present on earth, unfolding itself to be the actual shape and organization of the world."[9]

The first sentence of the second puzzle sums up the view in this way: "The ethical is the universal and as such, in turn, the divine. It is therefore correct [on this view] to say that all duty is ultimately to God."[10] Given these assumptions, no one whose private beliefs compete with the demands of the ethical, let alone override them, can be directed at the deity, simply because there is no more deity toward which these beliefs can be directed. Abraham is, on these terms, excluded from any knighthood of faith. If there is a form of faith of which he can be said nevertheless to be the father, then that faith is indeed paradoxical. According to it, the individual is higher than the universal.

Hegel's target in this section of *Philosophy of Right* is a philosophical cult of subjectivity that makes the individual conscience self-sufficient in matters of morality, abstracting the subjective element in ethical life from its union with the objective rational order, the union of these two being Hegel's conception of "the ethical" (*Das Sittliche* or *Sittlichkeit*). He calls such abstraction a perversion of the evil into good and of good into evil, in which "consciousness," in recognizing its power to "effect this perversion, is also made aware of itself as absolute." Its absolutizing itself in this way marks the "highwater mark of subjectivity at the level of morality."[11]

Referring directly to this passage, Johannes *de silentio* calls it, on Hegel's behalf, "a moral form of evil."[12] Hegel himself says that it is

> the form into which evil has blossomed in our present epoch, a result due to philosophy, i.e. to a shallowness of thought which has twisted a profound concept into this shape and usurped the name of philosophy, just as it has arrogated to evil the name of good.[13]

Preserving the ethical

Understandably there is no mention here of Abraham. Abraham was no philosopher, nor was it he who defined the evident evil of Isaac's sacrifice as though it were a good. Abraham's faith is pre-given and his intention to sacrifice his only son is a direct consequence of that faith however

[9] Hegel (1971a), p. 166. [10] FT, p. 96 (80) (p. 59), SKS 4, 160. [11] Hegel (1971a), p. 94.
[12] FT, p. 83 (63) (p. 47), SKS 4, 149. [13] Hegel (1971a), p. 94.

horrendous the test to which it is put. In Hegel's terms, we would have to say that it was God who was guilty of this perversion of evil into good.[14]

We note that *Fear and Trembling* talks of a "teleological" suspension of the ethical.[15] That means that in suspending the ethical, the action that amounts to such suspension must be serving some higher goal. A question often asked is whether that goal can still be called moral. If the ethical and morality are the same, it would seem not. But then Johannes *de silentio* tells us that, in being suspended, the ethical is "preserved" in something "higher."[16] Preservation here cannot, it seems, mean putting aside or shelving as with jam and other foodstuffs to be brought out on a later occasion. It must mean that the ethical is kept alive in some way but with another ulterior aim, or as one might just as well say, with another source. That source can be identified with the divine will, which on Hegel's implicitly pantheistic account is found in the norms according to which society is transparently founded. For Kierkegaard the divine will is, on the contrary, that of a personal God in whom the ideal of universality essential to morality is retained but where its varying shapes or approximations can no longer be identified in any actual shape and organization of the world. Nothing there counts *in itself* as an instantiation of the divine will. The will of God issues in good works only through the individual will. The higher *telos* in which the ethical is preserved is the ground of all things, and actions expressing that ground can no longer be adequately identified in ways associated with reciprocity and the Golden Rule.

Yet how can a divine will, on any conception, issue in a directive such as that given by God to Abraham? A father is commanded to kill his son, the deed intended moreover as a proof of the father's faith in the divine ground. To cap it all, there is the background premise of Abraham's faith: God's promise that through Isaac he shall be the father of the generations.

That question can be partly answered by investigating the origins of Kierkegaard's interest in Abraham together with his own later comments on *Fear and Trembling*. There is, however, a possible but undeclared

[14] Some hermeneutical fog surrounding *Fear and Trembling* might be dispersed if its God were seen as presented in Hegel's early theological writings, with which Kierkegaard was undoubtedly familiar. The deity there emerges from a culture of household and national gods, which explains "the horrible claim" bestowed on Abraham and his progeny that "He alone was God and that this nation was the only one to have a god." This was a "jealous" God outside his creation, and whose relationship to the world was one of "mastery." Here, however, Abraham departs from *Fear and Trembling*'s protagonist in seeking total independence in the world, freeing himself even from the love that would prevent him from sacrificing his son. See Hegel (1971a), pp. 186–88.

[15] FT, p. 83 (62) (p. 46), SKS 4, 148. [16] FT, p. 83 (63) (p. 47), SKS 4, 148.

symbolism in the story, a reason for its suppression emerging from that investigation.

The Bible tells us that Isaac is saved and a ram offered instead. If we focus exclusively on Abraham as he climbs the mountain, we may see in his state of mind a virtual admission that Isaac's true father is God. When Isaac is returned to him, it is on the understanding that Abraham is now no longer the arbiter of fatherhood, the true value of which lies with the ground of all things. Whether intended or not, the transition here reflects the direction in which Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship was to proceed. The ethical embodied in Judge William in *Either/Or* answers to Johannes *de silentio*'s formula that "it is the divine as such." In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the "ethical" is elevated into the "ethico-religious."[17]

Johannes *de silentio*'s themes in the third and final puzzle are silence and invisibility. Abraham's inability to disclose his true motive without appearing insane or plainly evil might, it is true, be explained by his being surrounded by the likes of Judge William for whom the good is inescapably transparent. It is often and perhaps rightly claimed that Kierkegaard pens Johannes *de silentio* as one such, this being why he must conclude that Abraham's faith is paradoxical. An alternative explanation is that once the good is located in the individual's will in a relationship to God, transparent ethics no longer automatically reaches the source of the good. The "hidden inwardness" of which *Postscript* speaks is one in which a self, first "revealed" in the ethical, as Judge William says it is "every man's duty" to become,[18] "annihilates" itself in order to establish its proper relationship to God.[19] An annihilated self is no longer in direct communication with the world. For it is, as Johannes *de silentio* says, the "relief of speech . . . that it translates me into the universal."[20]

Situating Kierkegaard

Despite a reported Hegelian period in his student days,[21] already in his fourth year of study Kierkegaard was insisting that Christianity and philosophy "can never be united."[22] Anti-Hegelian in spirit though this is, the view would not exclude access to religious truth through some

[17] Cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (hereinafter CUP), trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 332, SKS 7, 361.
[18] Kierkegaard (2004), p. 582, SKS 3, 304. The self chooses and does not create.
[19] CUP, e.g., p. 386, SKS 7, 509–10. [20] FT, p. 137 (139) (p. 100), SKS 4, 201.
[21] Kirmmse (1998), 217. [22] KJN 1, AA:13.

alternative to reason. There could still be room for Schleiermacher's idea of a "sense and taste for the infinite" (*Anschauung und Gefühl*).[23] Nor does it imply any change in Kierkegaard's early enthusiasm for Johan Georg Hamann, a romantic thinker famous for his conversion experience while on a business trip to London and whose debunking, Socratic humor Kierkegaard appreciated. It has been a temptation among Kierkegaard's readers to see the later stress on the passion of faith as a sign of lingering romantic affiliations. It is clear, however, from what his dialectical alter-ego Johannes Climacus writes in *Postscript* that the passion in question is not an alternative mode of access to truths inappropriately sought through reason; passion merely shows that you are in the proper position to set about the "task" of living in faith.

Kierkegaard knew he was not alone in opposing what many interpreted as Hegel's pantheistic dissolution of the notion of a personal God. Seven years as a student had provided him with ample opportunity to absorb German thought. The extent of his interest is reflected in the library records from the auction after his death. Among the periodicals Kierkegaard subscribed to was *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und speculative Theologie*, edited by Immanuel Hermann Fichte, son of the better-known Fichte. In a campaign directed at combating the depersonalization of God, the younger Fichte's own contribution was a spiritual monism, which in its theological aspect took the form of monotheism and called for a personal God. Emulating Schelling, Fichte sought to establish a philosophical basis for God's "personality,"[24] a word that crops up constantly in Kierkegaard's criticism of his time.[25] Reacting to misunderstandings concerning the humor in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he later noted that exactly in this lay its seriousness, adding that "what is new here is that here we have personality."[26]

In 1837, at a time of study preparatory to his belated examination for the theology degree, Kierkegaard nevertheless criticized the persistent attempts by Fichte and others, in spite of their "serious effort to acknowledge what is distinctive in Christianity," for making Christianity conform to "common human consciousness." They obscured the fact that philosophy and Christianity are "doubly concentric": each has its *own* centre, and these are not to be "sublated into the concept" as if the distinction had only been historical. What must not be "volatilized or taken from us by such tricks," he insists, is the concept of revelation, whose significance is

[23] Schleiermacher (2004), ch. 2, p. 29. *Ibid.* (1996), p. 36.
[24] Fichte (1834). Fichte's main work was (1846). [25] See, e.g., KJN 4, NB 4:58.
[26] KJN 6, NB 13:61 (1849).

that its content exceeds anything that common human consciousness can conceive as an ideal "or whatever else one wants."[27]

This could be one clue to the choice of Abraham as an exemplary believer. True, Abraham cannot be a Christian but if Christianity is not a human invention, then what is required of its adoption cannot be so easily anticipated. A properly Christian faith may involve a suffering that overshadows the relief it is supposed to bring by the likes of Nietzsche and Freud who, along with Feuerbach, identify its satisfactions as human projections into an imaginary "eternal" and "beyond." Thinking of the ease with which Kierkegaard took his contemporaries to satisfy the demands of their own faith, what better example with which to startle them out of their complacency than the simple faith of Abraham?

Local targets engaged Kierkegaard more than did the Left-Hegelians or those local radical writers associated with the Young Germany movement. It was the systematizing apologists of Christianity in his midst that fired Kierkegaard's literary talent. In *Stages on Life's Way*, the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus writes a "letter" to his reader, commenting on Shakespeare's Hamlet. He says that Ludwig Börne and Heinrich Heine, both Left-Hegelians, were "frequently well informed about the religious," which is to say "they know definitely they do not want to have anything to do with it." This is their "great advantage over the systematicians, who without knowing where the religious really is located take it upon themselves to explain it – . . . always unsuccessfully."[28]

A late reviewer of Kierkegaard's dissertation from 1841, *The Concept of Irony*, went so far as to put Kierkegaard in the same bracket as Feuerbach and other Left-Hegelians. Feeling it necessary to disclaim this "incomprehensible" alliance, Kierkegaard did so with a light wit as part of a "public confession" that displays quite another attitude toward his Danish contemporaries. The confession appeared in the newspaper *Fædrelandet* in June 1842, before the publication of *Either/Or*.

> Everything indicates that the decisive moment is approaching: there is an unrest and ferment that cannot possibly end up as just wind. A party life is everywhere astir. This must not of course be understood to mean that we have just one party that is strong, for that would not be a strong party life but a strong life in the party. No, a strong party life is astir in a multiplicity of parties. We have liberals, ultra-liberals, conservatives, ultra-conservatives, juste milieu [happy medium], in politics we have all imaginable and unimaginable qualities. We have Kantians, Schleiermacherians, we have

[27] KJN 1, EE:147 (1839). [28] Kierkegaard (1967), p. 452, SKS 6, 418.

> Hegelians. The latter have divided themselves again into two large parties: the one party is those who have not got into Hegel but are still Hegelians, the other of those who have got beyond Hegel but are still Hegelians; of the third party, the real Hegelians, we have very few. We have five Antipedobaptists, seven Baptists, nine Anabaptists; of the Baptists we have again three who think adults should be baptized in salt water, two who think they should be baptized in fresh water and one, forming the mediation, who holds for brackish water. We have two Straussians; we have a tailor on Utterslev Common who has formed a new sect consisting of himself and two tailor apprentices. Some time ago there was talk of him having won a third adherent from another profession, but just as he was about to capture him there was a breach that gave the neophyte occasion to abandon him and take one of the apprentices with him, and he of the other profession also came up with a new confession. In Pistolstrædet there is said at this time to be a man who has withdrawn in order to think out a new religion in solitude, and his results are looked forward to expectantly by the neighboring streets, Christenbernikovstræde and Peder Madsen's Alley. A strong party life is afoot everywhere. Soon we'll have not enough men for there to be one for each party. Our time is important as no other before it.[29]

If anyone formed a one-man party, it was Kierkegaard, though what the party stood for nobody really knew and could only guess. Less in the way of someone aiming at targets from a fixed position, Kierkegaard wrote like a literary urban guerilla able to move anywhere, aiming at anything and everything from whatever position was required. Included in the list just given, and shown no more respect than a religious eccentric, are some of the more formidable figures of the time. Numbered among the now "very few real" Hegelians was Johan Ludvig Heiberg. He had been the main representative of Hegel's philosophy during Kierkegaard's earlier days as a student. But with so much "party-splitting," as the confession also notes, Professor Heiberg and his orthodoxy were now "insignificant."

Stealing the limelight at the time was one of those who had gone further than Hegel though remaining a Hegelian. Hans Lassen Martensen was a formidable scholar who, like many others in Denmark, began as a devotee of Schleiermacher, on whom he had once tutored Kierkegaard. Returning as a Hegelian from a prolonged tour abroad, in the winter of 1837–38 Martensen had given a lecture series whose popularity changed the face of local Hegelianism.[30] It is not difficult to understand why Kierkegaard

[29] "Aabenbart Skriftemaal," *Fædrelandet*, 12 June 1842, SKS: Bladartikler 1842–51.

[30] A year before Kierkegaard's death (1855), Martensen became Denmark's primate. Two major works earned him a considerable reputation abroad: Martensen (1890), Martensen (1973, 1881, 1882). Early German and French translations were also published.

should be more concerned with a Right-Hegelian who sought to embrace an ethically relevant revelation in an extension of Hegelian orthodoxy than he was with Left-Hegelians who dismissed religion as such. Underlying his own usually satirical treatment of those who, through reasoning, thought away the needs to which religion responds, we again sense a persistent resentment at the ease with which his intellectual peers assumed privileged access to religious truth, diminishing it in the process.

Situating *Fear and Trembling*

Is the iconic tale of Abraham and Isaac designed then in Kierkegaard's retelling merely to mark in a vivid way that the price of faith was higher than his contemporaries liked to think? We ask again, how can the ethical be said in any sense to be preserved in Abraham? Is Kierkegaard really suggesting that our moral intuitions must give way to something we cannot grasp? Is he telling us that we lack the moral means to judge that Abraham demonstrated anything but a "moral form of evil"? Or is *Fear and Trembling* perhaps designed, when all is said and done, merely to serve an edifyingly Socratic function by pushing minds into unaccustomed areas where certainties lose their habitual grip?

Seeking harder ground, commentary has recently turned from the vexed question of the actual content of God's demand to the quality of the faith, the "humble courage,"[31] displayed in Abraham's unswerving commitment to something he believed. A closer look at what Kierkegaard has to say in the matter of faith in his own experience can support this focus and at the same time diminish the prima facie anomaly presented by *Fear and Trembling* in relation to Kierkegaard's other works.

Although we should treat Kierkegaard's retrospective appraisals of his own writings as cautiously as always in such cases, it is worth noting that in a journal entry predicting the fame that *Fear and Trembling* would bring him, we also read that the real "mystification" of his situation at the time of writing it – a matter we will come to in a moment – was that it "reproduced" his own life.[32]

This entry also refers us to another from shortly after the publication of *Either/Or*. Although poetic in style, its use of the metaphor of blackening the breast is unmistakably autobiographical. The motif occurs as a refrain in the opening "Atunement." The entry's topic is the "collision" that Abraham faces when wondering whether, in order to save Isaac's faith,

[31] FT, p. 77 (55) (p. 41), SKS 4, 143; see Carlisle (2010), pp. 193ff. [32] KJN 6, NB 12:147 (1849).

he should appear to be doing the devil's work rather than God's. For will Isaac not lose his own faith if he believes it to be a show of faith that he be deliberately killed by his father?

> But where, after all, is the contemporary poet who has a sense for such collisions? And yet Abraham's conduct was truly poetic, magnanimous, more magnanimous than everything I have read in tragedies. – When the child is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast, but her eye looks upon the child just as lovingly. The child believes it is the breast that has changed, but the mother is unchanged. And this is why she blackens the breast, because she says that it would be a shame for it to look so inviting when the child must not have it. – This collision is easily resolved, because the breast is only a part of the mother herself. Fortunate the person who did not experience more terrible collisions; who did not need to blacken himself; who did not need to travel to Hell in order to learn what the Devil looks like – so that he could depict himself like that and thus, if possible, save another human being, at least in his or her relation to God. This would be Abraham's collision.[33]

"The Seducer's Diary" closing the first part of *Either/Or* was purportedly an attempt by its real author to blacken himself in his former fiancée's eyes (but also in those of the public who would then feel relief on her behalf for having escaped marriage to someone capable of writing anything so salacious). That, for a writer flexing his literary muscles, doing so was anything like a journey to hell may be hard to believe, and in any case, as Kierkegaard admits, Regine Olsen had no difficulty in seeing through the stratagem. She was also by all accounts magnanimous and broad-minded enough to accept a Søren who had it in him to write such things. But even if, in the event, he failed to blacken himself in her eyes, the quotation implies that doing so would be the wrong way to deal with the collision. The right way is exemplified in the carefully staged rendering of the Genesis story in *Fear and Trembling*. Openly facing his son as his son's father intent on sacrificing him, Abraham faces the collision head on.

This indicates a further dimension to Abraham's faith. For there would still be the danger of Isaac losing *his* faith, a faith that until then implied that God does not require fathers to kill their sons just to prove that faith. There is then this added trust, that Isaac will be receptive to his openness about his intention, and that he will feel the love that Abraham has for him nevertheless, with the happy (if in real terms no doubt improbable) result that Isaac's image of his father not be blackened.

[33] KJN 1, JJ 87.

In late 1840, well before both *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling* were conceived, journal entries from a period that Kierkegaard spent at the pastoral seminary include material in the preparation of sermons that were part of the training. He was to include this material in each of these works. A focus of one entry, dealing with God's testing of Abraham, is on Abraham's unqualified trust, that he faced "the weightiest sacrifice that God could command" without wavering.[34] We gather from this entry that the gist of the sermon was that people are now so used to the story's outcome that they no longer appreciate what it meant to face such a test. The entry also anticipates *Fear and Trembling*'s focus on Abraham's "Here I am" in answer to God's call.[35] It says that we should "attend particularly to this trusting, God-devoted disposition, to this cheerful and unhesitating willingness to face trials, to answer bravely: Here I am." Kierkegaard adds:

> Is it the same with us, or are we not, if anything, eager to evade the situation when we sense that difficult trials draw near, wishing for nothing so much as an out-of-the-way corner of the world in which to hide ourselves, wishing that the mountains would conceal us ... Not so with Ab.: he answers bravely: Here I am; he troubles no one with his suffering ... We read: He rose early in the morning. He hastened as if to a joyous festival.[36]

A year later, Kierkegaard would face his own trials. He comes close to admitting that he chose the hiding option. Facing the dilemma that led to it could well be what he refers to when saying that *Fear and Trembling* reproduced his own life. His own out-of-the way corner was a writing desk where he could be poetic about his trials, his privacy furthermore protected at least formally by pseudonyms. Living ostentatiously the life of a *flaneur*, he was also concealing the fact that he had chosen this other, faith-denying refuge – a part of the real "mystification." As Kierkegaard withdrew with his trials into the "poetic," a place that he was to occupy for the next four-and-a-half years, recent thoughts of Abraham's steadfastness might naturally occur to his repentant mind, not least because Abraham's example offered so vivid a contrast to himself and his own untrusting way of dealing with them. In a much quoted entry from 1843 he says that if he had faith he would have stayed with Regine.[37]

In whatever way that might have turned out for either party, the "collision" in Kierkegaard's mind finds clear expression in the works immediately following *Either/Or*. In *Repetition*, Constantius' verdict on

[34] KJN 2, HH:8 (1840–41). [35] FT, p. 55 (22) (p. 18), SKS 4, 117. [36] KJN 2, HH:8 (1840–41).
[37] KJN 2, JJ:115.

his young friend is that with a "more devoutly religious background" he would "not have become a poet."[38] *Fear and Trembling* refers to the fable of Agnete and the merman, the latter re-portrayed to represent someone, or more accurately, a demonic force, facing the challenge of "saving" the victim of his seduction.

Conclusion

The biblical story enframes several aspects of faith that engaged Kierkegaard both personally and in his polemics. Beyond being unwavering in its openness, there is in Abraham the trust that the outcome will not affect the settled faith of the victim. By being open toward Isaac, thereby showing his own full faith in God, Abraham holds fast to the belief that Isaac will retain his own faith through the example of that of his father.

For Kierkegaard, however, one aspect of faith falls outside the frame. Johannes *de silentio* says that Abraham's faith was for "*this* life."[39] It would be misleading to read this as implying that Abraham counted on God returning Isaac after he had sacrificed him, something that he might have persuaded Isaac also to believe. The point is rather to stress the sheer enormity of God's test of Abraham's faith, there being no "beyond" in which what is lost on earth could later be recovered. As *Fear and Trembling* says, Abraham would take any talk of eternity to be a way out of his collision: "had his faith only been for a future life it would indeed have been easier to cast everything aside in order to hasten out of this world to which he did not belong."[40] That Isaac should be conceived had been hard enough to believe, given his own and Sarah's age, but now it was all to be taken quite conclusively away. "A Comment on Something in *Fear and Trembling*" (from 1850) says that Abraham's faith differed from those "higher clashes where what is expected is in total conflict with the order of nature (e.g. that Sarah gets a child though far beyond natural childbearing age)."[41] His clash was at such a "height" that the temptation he had to face down was choosing the ethical instead and so concluding that the command cannot have come from God.

A journal entry from eight years after *Fear and Trembling* offers a version of the story in which Abraham succumbs to the temptation. Abraham kills Isaac, whereupon the Lord, identified here as Jehovah, appears by Abraham's side and asks, "what have you done, you poor old man! I was your

[38] Kierkegaard (2009b), p. 80, SKS 4, 95. [39] FT, pp. 53–54 (20–21) (p. 17), SKS 4, 116.
[40] *Ibid*. [41] KJN 7, NB 17:21.

friend. I only wanted to test your faith. I shouted to you to stop." Then, "in a weak voice, half adoring, half crazed," Abraham answers that in the stress of the moment he failed to hear but that, even if he had heard, how could he dare believe it was the Lord's voice telling him to sacrifice his child? More likely that it was the voice of one tempting him to disobey. So if he had heard it at the start, either he would have had to think it was the tempter that gave the command, in which case he would not have set out for Moriah; or, being already convinced that it was God who gave the command, he would have thought it was the tempter who told him to stop. In this version, Jehovah, in order to repair the mistake, presents Abraham with a new Isaac, but Abraham shakes his head and says, "It wasn't that Isaac."[42]

This was not Abraham either, not the Abraham who stays firm to the end, obeying the command to stay his hand as obediently as he did the command to raise it in sacrifice. Kierkegaard likens this obedience to that of "the nimble willingness of someone in service, and who on the point of fulfilling an errand has to run back again, thus having run in vain." "Oh, how great that is," says Kierkegaard, adding in quotes (perhaps echoing Johannes *de silentio*): "Yet none was great like Abraham, who can comprehend him?"[43]

Just two years before his death, Kierkegaard returns to this scenario, alters it slightly and concludes by saying that returning Isaac to Abraham is a Judaic idea. Under the heading "New 'Fear and Trembling'," Isaac is sacrificed and returned (rather than, as before, replaced) but, knowing that he had been picked out as a sacrifice, the young boy had become "in a sense an old man, as old as Abraham"; in other words, no longer in the relation of son to father. However, Jehovah took mercy on Abraham and, in order to leave him in a situation "infinitely" better than had the mistake not occurred, offers him an "eternity."

> [S]oon you will be united there forever with Isaac, there where you are eternally suited to each other. If you had heard my voice, held back, you would then have got Isaac back for this life, but this matter of eternity had not become clear to you. You went too far, you spoiled everything – and still I make everything even better than if you hadn't gone too far: there is an eternity.[44]

Here the appropriately Judaic reading gives way to one incorporating a Christian notion of eternity. In Christian terms Isaac, once killed, "is really

[42] KJN 8, NB 24:89 (1851). [43] *Ibid*. [44] KJN 9, NB 28:41 (1853), my translation.

sacrificed – but then eternity," whereas in Judaism "it was only a test" in which Abraham keeps Isaac, and "the whole thing stays essentially within this life."[45]

But it seems that Abraham would have misunderstood this eternity, grasping it as a place to which "to hasten out of [a] world to which he did not belong."[46] As Johannes *de silentio* remarks:

> Abraham's faith was not of that kind, if there is such, for a faith like that [which treats the eternal as a better version of this life in the beyond] is not really faith but only its remotest possibility, a faith that has some inkling of its object at the very edge of the field of vision but remains separated from it by a yawning abyss in which despair gets up to its tricks.[47]

That last remark anticipates the analysis of despair six years later in *The Sickness unto Death*. For a faith in eternity of the true kind, fear and trembling before God would have to be preceded by the pressures of spiritual dawning described in *The Concept of Anxiety* (published less than a year after *Fear and Trembling*), in which the prospect of this world being qualitatively insufficient for the individual's human fulfillment has to be faced. In the quotation just given, it sounds almost as though, in this "new" *Fear and Trembling*, Jehovah had hit upon Christianity as a possibility.

When sketching the scenario that later became *Fear and Trembling*'s puzzle-creating plot, Kierkegaard conjured at the same time with a thought that became the closing theme of its predecessor, *Either/Or*: the edifying potential of thinking that before God we are "always in the wrong."[48] Much suggests continuity between the two works, for instance Judge William's closing remarks concerning difficulties one may "stumble upon" in realizing the universal, and on the possibility of being "uncommon in a nobler sense."[49] Kierkegaard was now writing from experience, the very writing itself proof that he had not realized the universal. Marriage had been sacrificed for a venture in authorship.

But what if authorship could itself be a way of preserving the ethical in something higher? The parallel here with Abraham certainly fails: in *Fear and Trembling* it does not occur to Abraham to disobey God, nor therefore to ask himself what he might do to regain the universal. But even if lack of faith prevented Kierkegaard from staying with Regine, and blackening

[45] KJN 8, NB 24:89 (1851); 9, NB 28:41 (1853). [46] FT, p. 53 (20) (p. 17), SKS 4, 116.
[47] FT, p. 53 (translation altered) (20–21) (p. 17), SKS 4, 116.
[48] KJN 2, HH:10 (1840). The words "always" and "wrong" are in bold type.
[49] SKS 3, pp. 310 and 313; Kierkegaard (2004), pp. 586 and 589.

himself in her eyes would have meant failing the test of openness, he could still ask himself whether the choice he had taken to act "in the particular" could be justified as a form of faith. Here, it makes no difference that the deed which would place Abraham outside the universal was still to be performed while in Kierkegaard's case it was a fait accompli.

It was to the Old Testament story of Abraham that Kierkegaard turned when asking himself what was the "weightiest sacrifice that God could command."[50] *Fear and Trembling*'s staging is above all a piece of poetizing, hardly, for instance, an attempt to make new sense of the *Akedah*. In another place, not in connection with the book, Kierkegaard says that the fear and trembling of Philippians 2:12 are not "the primus motor in the Chr. Life, for that is love. Fear and trembling are what the balance is in the clock – it keeps the Chr. life ticking."[51] In the same group of entries where he writes both of Abraham and of always being in the wrong before God, there is another under the heading "God's Test." It contains the remark that "God's tests are grounded in love."[52] Perhaps in less unusual circumstances Kierkegaard would have fallen for the well-known reading that focuses on God's mercy in calling on Abraham to stay his hand. Johannes *de silentio* dismisses that angle; it becomes a trial, something that can "say a lot or little" but in retrospect "is as quickly done as said."[53] Checking any tendency to read the story from the point of view of its happy ending, the focus in *Fear and Trembling* is determinedly on the climbing, not the descending Abraham. Through Johannes *de silentio*, Kierkegaard is concentrating our minds upon the horrendous clash in Abraham's mind as he rode up the mountain.[54] It is a horror vision that puts in magnified relief the state of a pious man's mind when the universal fails to coincide with what he feels is his destiny.

The drama slackens when Kierkegaard returns to the individual's priority over the universal in a journal entry from 1849. It says that being the exception is justified only if one has a "God-relationship at firsthand." He refers to his own case. Since Regine's God-relationship was only "at secondhand," they could not continue their relationship as two exceptions (to marriage). His general point is that when acting "in the particular" you cannot make whatever the action or inaction is into a rule to be followed

[50] KJN 2, HH:8.
[51] KJN 2, EE:25 (1839); cf. KJN 5, NB 12:82 (1849): "At first sight, Xnty is and must be so terrifying that only an absolute *shall* can drive a hum. being into it. But people have abolished this first aspect."
[52] KJN 2, HH:12 (1840). [53] FT, p. 80 (59) (p. 44), SKS 4, 145.
[54] Cf. KJN 7, NB 17:21: "This is what Joh. d.s has brought home again and again. It is all a matter, he says, of passionate concentration."

by others. Doing so, he says, was the mistake of the Middle Ages.[55] The exception's role is not to make converts to exceptionality but to help people to realize the universal. By inference we can say that, even if the story of Abraham and Isaac is read at its face value, it is not telling us to follow Abraham's example. Nor, to return to that matter of trust in openness, need we infer from Abraham's willingness to obey the command to sacrifice his son that Isaac should take the faith he himself retains to imply that he should follow his father's example.

If in that example Kierkegaard found an apotheosis of his own God-conflict, there was also a both milder and wider context in which he seems to have "enjoyed" a sense of kinship with Abraham. From a time when Kierkegaard himself felt forced to live a more isolated life, he came to identify Abraham as the "eternal prototype of the religious person."

> As he had to leave the land of his forefathers for a foreign land, so indeed must the religious person leave, that is, forsake, an entire generation of his contemporaries – even though he remains among them, albeit isolated, *alien* to them. Being an alien, being in exile – this is precisely the characteristic suffering of the religious person.[56]

[55] KJN 6, NB 11:183 (1849); cf. KJN 7, NB 15:91. [56] KJN 7, NB 18:64 (1850).

CHAPTER 2

Fear and Trembling*'s "Attunement" as midrash*

Jacob Howland

It has been well observed that Johannes de Silentio offers in *Fear and Trembling* "his own version of a midrash on Abraham's struggle,"[1] and several scholars have explored the relationship between his reflections on this struggle and the tradition of rabbinic midrash, or scriptural interpretation.[2] Yet there is more work to be done in this area, and not simply for philological reasons. In particular, I believe that the multiple narratives of the first chapter of *Fear and Trembling*, entitled *Stemning* or "Attunement," can – and should – be read as midrash, and studied in relation to the very different versions of the *Akedah* (the scriptural narrative of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac) that are recorded in the Jewish tradition. This chapter aims to show that reading "Attunement" as midrash can illuminate the problem of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, and perhaps even enrich our understanding of the *Akedah* itself.

In at least one essential respect, "Attunement" presents *Fear and Trembling* in microcosm: it tells the story of an anonymous man who – like Silentio – tries to understand the faith that Abraham displays in the *Akedah*, but is unable to do so. What is the point of Silentio's story? To what is it supposed to "attune" the reader? What accounts for the interpretative failure of its protagonist (hereafter referred to as "the exegete")? How might it be related to Silentio's own failure to understand Abraham? These basic questions motivate the present inquiry.

The first section of this chapter argues that "Attunement" has significant antecedents in rabbinic literature, and that understanding this text as a

I am grateful to Edward Mooney for inviting me to speak at the annual banquet of the Søren Kierkegaard Society in 2013, and for suggesting the topic of "Attunement" as midrash. Ed is truly the father of my *logos*. I would also like to thank Stephen Gardner and Daniel Conway for their extremely helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

[1] The quotation is from Katz (2005), p. 29. Cf. Halevi (1955), p. 25: "Kierkegaard possessed a midrashic type of thinking and expression."

[2] Fox (1953), Halevi (1955), Green (1982), and Katz (2005).

kind of midrash clarifies, at least in a general way, what the reader is supposed to *do* with it. I also note certain significant differences between the exegete's interpretative project and that of the rabbis. The second section offers an overview of rabbinic midrash on the *Akedah*, and then begins to examine the details of the exegete's interpretation. I contend that, while "Attunement" makes audible the inner dissonance of the *Akedah* – a dissonance that is effectively muted in rabbinic interpretations – it is in its own way insufficiently faithful to the text. Put roughly, the rabbis add too much to the *Akedah*, while the exegete subtracts too much from it. The midrash of "Attunement" is nonetheless instructive, and not simply because it reflects the exegete's deep anxieties and disappointments. The third section argues that the exegete's running commentary about weaning a child may help to open our ears to the inner drama of parental rejection that is played out in the *Akedah*. I conclude in the fourth section by reflecting on the ways in which "Attunement" anticipates Silentio's own inability to comprehend the story told in Genesis 22, and by returning once more to the Jewish tradition for some final thoughts on Abraham.

"Attunement," aggadic midrash, and Talmudic polyphony

The first chapter of *Fear and Trembling* begins so simply that it is easy to miss its literary complexity. "There was once a man": this is the abstract and archetypal language of fairy tales and fables, stories that appeal immediately to children everywhere because they explore universal human experiences in the timeless and indefinite region of myth.[3] But it is also the deceptively straightforward language of biblical parable. The complexity of Silentio's narrative arises partly from its recursively structured form and content. We learn directly that the man of whom he speaks – the exegete – was obsessed with a "beautiful story" he himself heard "as a child." When the story of "how God tested Abraham, and how he withstood the test" was first related to him, perhaps by his father or his mother, he had seemed to grasp it immediately; as an adult, however, he could no longer retrieve this understanding from the written text, because "life had separated what had been united in the child's pious simplicity." As time passed, he read the story with "ever greater admiration"; he thought of it more and more, and with an enthusiasm that

[3] I cite *Fear and Trembling* (FT) parenthetically in the text, and I generally refer to Sylvia Walsh's translation for Cambridge University Press. (For *Stemning*, however, I prefer Hannay's "Attunement" to Walsh's "Tuning Up.") Biblical passages are cited parenthetically in the text. Unless otherwise specified, translations are drawn from the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, and chapter and verse numbers refer to Genesis.

was inversely proportional to his comprehension. "Finally, he forgot everything else because of it; his soul had only one wish, to see Abraham, one longing, to have been witness to that event." Provoked by this wish and this longing, he imagined new ways to narrate the *Akedah*, but in the end he still could not fathom the faith of Abraham (FT 7–8/SKS 4, 105–06).

As this brief summary makes clear, "Attunement" is the story of a man who tells himself stories in the hope of comprehending another story. We shall see directly that telling stories as a way of understanding Scripture is a venerable interpretative strategy, and in fact, the man uses versions of yet another story – that of a child who is to be weaned – to comment on his variations on the theme of the *Akedah*. Even more interesting, the exegete's own story recapitulates the ancient story of Abraham and Isaac, which is in a basic sense the story of all human beings, both individually and collectively. Like all of us, he experiences loss and fragmentation when he leaves childhood ("the land of lost content," in A. E. Houseman's words),[4] and these experiences seem only to increase with age. He is therefore ever more strongly attracted to Abraham, who in Genesis 22 would seem to furnish the most extreme example of a life that is falling apart, but who nonetheless manages to hold everything together with an apparently seamless grace. At the same time, the transition from childhood to adulthood, and from the fullness and immediacy of the spoken word to the poverty and indirectness of a written text that yields only incomplete and conflicting perspectives, reiterates the overall course of human experience from the viewpoint of religious traditionalism. For with the cessation of prophecy, we latecomers have no recourse but to mine Scripture for the traces of an understanding that was originally transmitted directly from the mouth of God, so to speak, to the ears of human beings.

We have seen that "Attunement" reflects multiple facets of the human experience of loss and fragmentation. Given the universality of its theme and its incorporation of recursion and repetition, it is unsurprising that "Attunement" has notable literary antecedents. Most striking, perhaps, is its similarity to the aggadic midrash of the rabbis and the polyphonic commentary of the Talmud. Let us consider each of these in turn.

The Hebrew word *midrash* designates both the process and the product of interpretation. Emerging after the end of prophecy, midrash substituted for the direct intervention or communication of God. It dates from the fifth century BCE, in the period of Ezra, "a scribe expert in the Torah of Moses" who "dedicated himself to study [*lidrosh*] the Torah . . . so as to observe it, and to teach laws and rules to Israel" (Ezra 7:6, 10). Built on the

[4] Houseman (1958), p. 58.

root *drash*, "to seek," midrash came to mean specifically the interpretation of both legal or prescriptive (*halakhic*) and non-legal (*aggadic*) portions of Scripture.[5] As developed by the rabbis, aggadic midrash is notable for its extraordinarily free-wheeling and imaginative nature. The rabbis' tendency to find unexpected meanings in Scripture, generating interpretations that fill the empty spaces and even overflow the banks of the text, is partly explained by their belief that the Torah implicitly contains answers to the fundamental questions of human existence: "Turn it and turn it over again," the Mishnah asserts, "for everything is in it."[6] The exegete of "Attunement" seems to share this conviction, or at least to hold that some humanly essential truth is latent in the *Akedah*. Interestingly, the basic conservatism of this opinion, which privileges the biblical text above any other potential source of wisdom, goes hand-in-hand with interpretative innovation, without which the text could not possibly be construed to contain "everything." This tension is fundamental to the act of scriptural interpretation as modeled by Silentio as well as the rabbis.

"Attunement" resembles rabbinic midrash in another respect as well: as the rabbis so often do, the exegete uses storytelling as a means of interpreting biblical narrative. It is possible for him to do so because the narrative of Genesis 22 is highly economical, not to say downright laconic. Two whole days, for example, pass without comment between the third and the fourth verses of the chapter. What was Abraham thinking and feeling from the morning he saddled his ass to the moment he laid eyes on the mountain? It is natural, and perhaps even necessary, to try to respond to this sort of question by fashioning a narrative of one's own. Constructing such narratives is furthermore a way of personally appropriating the meaning of the story one is trying to interpret, and "Attunement" calls on the reader to engage in just such an act of appropriation. Because all of its narratives, including the frame story of a man who was obsessed with understanding Abraham, are sparse and undeveloped – offering, like the *Akedah*, sketches of their subjects rather than fully realized portraits – readers will inevitably fill in their silences by retelling them in a manner that reflects their particular life-views, concerns, anxieties, and so forth. In this way, "Attunement" solicits its own, peculiarly individual form of aggadic midrash.

Finally, it is worth noting that the literary structure of "Attunement" reflects the kind of open-ended and dialectical polyphony characteristic of the great body of rabbinic thought known as the Talmud. The Talmud comprises a detailed code of law, the Mishnah, coupled with an expansive

[5] See Howland (2011), pp. 29–30 with the sources cited there. [6] Pirke Avot 5:26.

commentary, the Gemara. Since the early sixteenth century, a printed page of Talmud has included a central block of text, in which passages from the Mishnah are interspersed with corresponding sections of the Gemara, and, in smaller typeface, a thick margin consisting of additional commentary from a variety of sources.[7] This "visually seductive artifact"[8] – text, commentary, and commentary on the commentary – invites readers to participate in many-sided debates that are only rarely resolved. A closely analogous structure appears in "Attunement," which includes a frame story that surrounds a multi-layered center consisting of a partially edited version of Genesis 22:1–2, in which God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; four variations on the scriptural narrative that follows this command; and, as commentary on each of these, four narrative vignettes on the theme of weaning a child. In other words, Silentio – anticipating the poet he describes in the following chapter, who "admire[s], love[s], and rejoice[s] in the hero" (FT 12/SKS 4, 112) – imaginatively produces in "Attunement" something like the colloquy of multiple voices one finds in the Talmud. Yet he is ultimately unable to resolve the problem of understanding Abraham; as the Talmud so often does, he leaves it to the reader to have the final word, if possible, or else to maintain the silence of perplexity.

The literary affinities we have observed between the first chapter of *Fear and Trembling*, aggadic midrash, and Talmudic discourse suggest that "Attunement" calls on us to become active and critical interpreters of its interlocking narratives, and thus also of the biblical text around which these narratives revolve. Doing so, these affinities imply, will help us to encounter the *Akedah* in a manner that is maximally reflective and self-conscious, and so to become fully responsible for the meanings we derive from struggling with it. As we shall see, however, readers who have "tuned in" to the reflective and imaginative task of interpretation that Silentio has set for them may ultimately discover more than they bargained for.

Before proceeding further, it will be helpful also to note certain significant disanalogies between the interpretative project of "Attunement" and rabbinic inquiry. On the one hand, the rabbi who produces midrashic commentary takes part in a grand tradition, having earned his authority to do so on the basis of his scholarly training. The exegete, on the other hand, is ignorant of Hebrew and is neither "a thinker" nor "a learned exegete" (FT 8/SKS 4, 106); unlike the scribes and the rabbis, sages among the people of the book, he stands alone before the word of God, without

[7] Steinsalz (1989), p. 49. [8] Akenson (1998), p. 378.

availing himself of any tradition or teaching to make sense of it.[9] What, then, is the source of his authority to interpret the biblical narrative? There is something childlike about his apparent assumption that the meaning of the Bible should be open to anyone at any time. As much as we may applaud this conviction, it raises the distinct possibility that the exegete might have overlooked something essential to understanding the text – a problem that rabbinic Judaism attempts to solve by the participation of multiple voices in the ongoing conversation of a living tradition. To be sure, he *is* involved in a kind of dialogue, but it is a silent and internal one. Put another way, the polyphony of "Attunement" is the surface of what is literally a monologue; and even when the exegete speaks aloud, as he does at the very end of the chapter, there is no indication that he is talking to anyone other than himself.

It is furthermore important to note that the exegete's extreme obsession with the *Akedah* runs counter to the spirit of rabbinic Judaism. "He forgot everything else because of it," Silentio writes; "his soul had only one wish, to see Abraham, one longing, to have been witness to that event." His goal is not moral or practical, but purely contemplative; he desires not to change his own comportment, but merely to observe that of Abraham.[10] In the rabbinic tradition, however, theoretical activity is not meant to substitute for action, but to potentiate it.[11] Even on the exegete's own terms, his exclusive devotion to the *Akedah* is pathological. In restricting himself to the role of poet of the heroism of Abraham, he seems to have exacerbated, and not merely to have forgotten, the problem of existential fragmentation that caused him to return to this story in the first place.

Not surprisingly, the exegete's isolation and quietism are reflected in the details of his interpretation of the *Akedah*, an interpretation that is in certain respects diametrically opposed to that of the rabbis. Developing this contrast will help to bring into focus the relative advantages of this interpretation, as well as essential features of the biblical text that are overlooked both by the exegete and by the rabbinic tradition in general.

[9] Silentio remarks that "had he [the exegete] known Hebrew, then perhaps he would easily have understood the story and Abraham" (FT 8/SKS 4, 106). Conway (2003) observes that this comment underscores the exegete's insistence on reading the *Akedah* "on his own terms," and argues that both he and Silentio deliberately close themselves off from genuine attunement to the biblical text.

[10] I owe this observation to Edward Mooney.

[11] Rabbinic literature repeatedly warns against study without observance. See the sources cited at Halivni (1986), pp. 148–50 n. 8. Kierkegaard, too, placed action above understanding; cf. Halevi (1955), p. 23.

Hearing in silence: the *Akedah* in rabbinic midrash and "Attunement"

Louis Ginzberg offers an overview of rabbinic midrash on the *Akedah* in his magisterial book *The Legends of the Jews*.[12] Ginzberg's work must be used with caution, because his project of fabricating a unified narrative from multiple sources inevitably makes the tradition of rabbinic commentary seem more univocal than it actually is.[13] Nevertheless, the stories he has assembled amply display the rabbis' fondness for innovative scriptural interpretation, while confirming Ronald Green's assertion that, in the case of the *Akedah*, "the rabbinic mind converts a seemingly arbitrary and capricious act by God into proof of his equity and justice."[14]

To begin with, several rabbinic sources fabricate a prologue to the story told in Genesis 22 that assimilates the tales of Abraham and Job. In this prologue, God conceives the command to sacrifice Isaac as a means of setting in motion a public proof of Abraham's faithfulness – one that will decisively refute Satan's accusation that Abraham's blessings have caused him to forget God.[15] This interpretation establishes that God has good reason for testing Abraham, while simultaneously portraying him as a defender of truth and righteousness. What is more, the rabbis effectively absolve both God and Abraham of moral culpability in relation to Isaac by describing him not as a "lad," as the biblical text asserts (22:12), but as an adult who participates freely and willingly in the preparations for his own sacrifice.[16] Indeed, the master-midrash that Ginzberg reconstructs portrays both Abraham and Isaac as knowledgeable individuals with special powers of perception. Abraham repeatedly recognizes Satan in his various disguises, and Isaac has enough understanding – both of himself and of

[12] Ginzberg (1925).

[13] It is also beyond the scope of Ginzberg's book to show how midrash on the *Akedah* reflected the historical needs of particular Jewish communities. In medieval Ashkenaz, Isaac was said to have been slaughtered by Abraham and then resurrected by God. Spiegel (1993) demonstrates that this interpretation was crafted with a view to contemporary events: "the biblical figures were drawn in the light of the actualities of the Crusades, when the saints of Germany and France sanctified the Name [of God] in droves" (p. 134).

[14] Green (1982), pp. 5 and 8; cf. Fox (1953), pp. 162–63.

[15] Ginzberg (1925), vol. 1, pp. 272–73 with vol. 5, pp. 248–49 n. 228; Green (1982), p. 5. God's "protagonist" and man's "accuser" (Halevi 1955, 21), the Hebrew Satan is "not the fallen angel of the Christian tradition, but . . . a heavenly investigator/prosecuting attorney" (Wettstein 2012, p. 164).

[16] Ginzberg (1925), vol. 1: 279; vol. 5: 249, n. 229. Some rabbinic sources claim that Isaac was thirty-seven years old when he accompanied his father to Moriah; see *Midrash Rabbah* vol. 1, p. 485 (= Bereshit Rabbah 55.4).

proper sacrificial practice – to ask that Abraham bind his hands and feet before drawing the blade: in his fear at the sight of the knife, he calmly explains, he might inadvertently resist his father, which could cause him to injure himself and thereby render the sacrifice ritually unfit.[17] Finally, the rabbis imagine that God shares with Abraham a divine perspective on the meaning of the *Akedah*, one that places it in the context of the past and future experience of the people of Israel. He accordingly reveals to Abraham that the Temple will be built on the site of his near-sacrifice of Isaac, which happens to be the same place where Cain and Abel made their offerings to God, and where Noah built an altar to him.[18]

Certain features of "Attunement" are immediately apparent when it is considered against the backdrop of rabbinic midrash on the *Akedah*. The silence and solitude of Abraham, Isaac, and God in "Attunement" offer a stark contrast to their wordy interaction in rabbinic sources. The God of the rabbis is transparently rational and good; their Abraham and Isaac, confident and knowing. The God of "Attunement," however, is distant and inscrutable, and Abraham and Isaac are correspondingly ignorant and anxious. This is the hidden God who tells Moses that "you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live" (Exod. 33:20) – "God in His own nature and majesty," as Luther writes, who "neither deplores nor takes away death, but works life, and death, and all in all," and who is, he warns, "to be left alone."[19] Silentio's title is thus deeply ironic; far from introducing a harmonious reading of the text, much less one that is in tune with well-developed Jewish and Christian conceptions of God's benevolent and loving nature, "Attunement" undertakes a kind of interpretative archaeology that emphasizes the inner dissonance of the narrative it addresses. Its approach to the *Akedah* could therefore be described as pre-rabbinic, and more generally pre-theological, in that it returns us to the rawness, opacity, and sparseness of the biblical text.

The archaeological impetus of "Attunement" is typical of Kierkegaard. It brings to mind his attempt in *The Concept of Irony* to uncover the nature of the historical Socrates by working backward from the writings of his contemporaries, as well as Johannes Climacus' endeavor in *Philosophical Fragments* to uncover the original phenomena of philosophy and faith as

[17] Ginzberg (1925), vol. 1, pp. 277, 280; vol. 5, pp. 249–50, n. 234 and 250, n. 242. This magnification of Isaac's "moral personality" illustrates "the Jewish confidence that God cannot command wickedness" (Green 1982, p. 8).

[18] Ginzberg (1925), vol. 1, p. 285; vol. 5, p. 253, nn. 251–53.

[19] Luther (1957), p. 170.

exemplified in the speeches and deeds of Socrates and Christ. Analogously, "Attunement" works to correct all interpretations – including Christian ones – that obscure the primitive meaning of the biblical text by reading back into it theological assumptions derived from later experiences.[20] Yet the exegete's interpretative archaeology is much more radical than Climacus', and perhaps even scandalous from the perspective of Danish Lutheranism, in that he leaves the New Testament – and thus the loving God of the Incarnation, as well as the suffering God of the Crucifixion – altogether out of consideration.

The exegete rightly emphasizes that Abraham must have approached Mount Moriah in fear and trembling, as he could not have been certain that God would brook no evil. If Abraham does achieve knowledge of the moral nature the rabbis attribute to God, which decisively differentiates him from the terrifying deities of the pagans, it comes only when the angel commands him to stay his hand (22:11–12).[21] Yet if the rabbis read too much into the text, the exegete exaggerates its darkness and density by reading too much out of it. This exaggeration manifests itself in the first instance in his selective editing of the biblical narrative. Here is his paraphrase of Genesis 22:1–2, the scriptural soil in which each of his four variations on the *Akedah* is rooted:

> And God tested Abraham and said to him, take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering upon a mountain that I will show you.[22]

This paraphrase differs from the biblical text in several particulars. It skips over the transitional words "Some time after," which introduce chapter 22 and connect it with the preceding narrative, and it omits the entire second half of the first verse, which precedes God's command to sacrifice Isaac: "He [God] said to him, 'Abraham,' and he answered, 'Here I am' [*hineini*]" (22:1).[23] The first omission disconnects the *Akedah* from the long history, beginning in Genesis 12, of God's direct intervention in Abraham's life. The second obscures God's intimacy with Abraham, to

[20] Cf. Green (1998), pp. 258–60. In assimilating Isaac to Jesus, for example, the church fathers understand the *Akedah* only with the benefit of hindsight. On the similarities between rabbinic and Christian interpretations of the *Akedah*, see Kessler (2004); on the possible pagan roots of both Jewish and Christian atonement theologies, see Spiegel (1993).

[21] See Goodman (1996), pp. 15–23.

[22] This passage is underlined in the original Danish.

[23] Another difference is that, where Silentio writes "take Isaac, your only son, whom you love," 22:2 reads "take your son, your only one, Isaac, whom you love."

whom he calls out by name, as well as the ready eagerness with which Abraham responds to the divine voice. Taken together, these editorial omissions effectively rewrite the *Akedah* as a story in which Abraham has no substantial personal relationship or special familiarity with God. And yet, the secret of his faith could be supposed to reside precisely in the immediacy of this relationship.

Consider, for example, Genesis 15:6, where God has just told Abraham that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars: "And because he put his trust in the LORD [and here the text has יהוה, the unpronounceable name of God], he reckoned it to his merit." "Put his trust in" translates *he'emin bah*, a Hiphil form of the verb *aman*, which could also be rendered as "believe in." The Septuagint translates *he'emin* as *episteusen*, and we do well to recall that *pistis*, or "trust" in ordinary Greek, becomes the New Testament's favorite word for "faith." In brief, the Bible represents Abraham's faith in God as a matter of personal trust in the particular individual to whom Scripture refers by the name of YHVH. Because this trust has been sustained and strengthened by his direct familiarity or intimacy with God, its ultimate grounds may be known only to Abraham. It may therefore be difficult, if not impossible, for him to persuade anyone else that it is reasonable, particularly when he seems to contradict ethical norms in acting on it. But because he ignores – and even suppresses – the rich personal relationship of God and Abraham, the exegete lays the groundwork for Silentio's later insistence that the story of their encounter cannot be rationally evaluated in anything other than the universal language of ethics.

The exegete's tendency to separate what is united in Scripture is apparent also in the details of the four stories he tells about the near sacrifice of Isaac. The first asserts that Abraham "went up the mountain alone, leading Isaac by the hand," thus emphasizing the solitude he experiences even in the company of his son (FT 8/SKS 4, 107). The corresponding passage in Genesis, however, states that "the two walked off together" (22:6). The third imagines that Abraham "rode out alone . . . to Mount Moriah" after returning with Isaac: "He threw himself upon his face, he begged God to forgive his sin, that he had been willing to sacrifice Isaac, that the father had forgotten his duty toward the son." But God did not reply. "More than once he rode his lonely trail," the story continues, "but found no peace of mind" (FT 10/SKS 4, 110). The silence of God in this narrative reminds us that "Attunement" nowhere mentions the angelic voice that calls out to Abraham on the mountain, and to which he once again responds "Here I am" (22:11) – "the highest point in the drama,"

according to Emmanuel Levinas, because it is where Abraham attends to "the voice that led him back to the ethical order."[24]

What explains the exegete's editorial omissions and interpretative exaggerations? There can be little doubt that the way he tells Abraham's story reflects his sense of God's absence and unavailability. The exegete, Silentio writes, was "engrossed . . . not [by] the artistic weave of the imagination but the shudder of the thought" (FT 8/SKS 4, 105). In narrative, however, imagination functions as the theater of thought – the indispensable means of opening up a space for reflection. One may guess that the exegete's self-defeating wish to disentangle thought from imagination in thinking through the story of Abraham springs from his desire for a relationship with God that is independent of the medium of Scripture. While this inference is necessarily speculative, it is supported by the fact that the commentary he appends to each of his four versions of the *Akedah* establishes an analogy between the relationships of God, Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac and perhaps the most intimate and immediate of all human bonds – that of mother and child. Let us now turn to this most revealing commentary.

The anxiety of the orphan: weaning and abandonment in "Attunement"

The exegete's decision to connect the *Akedah* with the experience of weaning and being weaned is rooted in the text of Genesis, and so is not merely a reflection of his inability to recover the "pious simplicity" of his childhood. Some background is in order. In chapter 16, Sarah – then named Sarai, and still childless – instructs Abraham to consort with the slave Hagar so that she might have a son. Abraham complies, although Sarai subsequently blames him for her having been lowered in Hagar's esteem, and, with her husband's permission, treats Hagar so unkindly that she flees into the wilderness. Hagar is talked into returning by God, and Ishmael is born. When God later announces that Sarah herself will give birth, we are told that Abraham threw himself on his face "and laughed [*v'yitsḥak*]" (17:17). Built on the verb *tsaḥak*, "to laugh," *Yitsḥak* is the Hebrew name of Isaac. This becomes a running pun. Sarah "laughed"

[24] Levinas (1996), quoted in Conway (2003). The exegete thus forecloses Levinas' "developmental" reading of the *Akedah*, on which see Conway (2003) and especially Katz (2005). Goodman (1996) offers a similar interpretation that is independent of Levinas, but also grounded in the Jewish tradition. Goodman asserts that Abraham is rewarded "not for blind obedience . . . but for (and through) moral insight"; in the *Akedah*, "violence and terror" are ultimately "debarred from the idea of God" (pp. 22–23).

(*titsḥak*) when she overheard the news that she would bear a child, and the verb is repeated three times in the next three lines (18:12–15). When Isaac is born in Genesis 21, the chapter immediately preceding the *Akedah*, Sarah declares that "God has brought me laughter," and then she revealingly adds that "everyone who hears will laugh for me [*yitsḥak-li*]" – for *me*, but not for anyone else, the point being that she delights in the glory that will be hers alone through having been singled out by God for a miraculous birth.[25] In her joyful pride, she breaks into poetry:

> Who would have said to Abraham
> That Sarah would suckle children!
> Yet I have born a son in his old age.
> (21:7)

The next verse informs us that "The child grew up and was weaned" – an event that dramatically improves his odds of survival – "and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned."

At this point, Sarah's hostility to Hagar resurfaces in a particularly ugly way. She sees Ishmael playing and demands that Hagar and he be cast out into the wilderness, "for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac" (21:9–10). The word "playing" translates *m'tsaḥek*. In Sarah's jealous eyes, Ishmael was "Isaacing";[26] she could not tolerate his innocent laughter, even – or especially – if it gave pleasure to others, because she had no wish to share the admiration and esteem that Isaac was to bring her. Ishmael would have died in the desert had God not intervened (cf. 21:15), a thought that connects Sarah's brutality toward her stepchild and slave with the epigram of *Fear and Trembling*: "What Tarquin the Proud communicated in his garden with the beheaded poppies was understood by the son but not by the messenger" (FT 2/SKS 4, 100). For Tarquin's cryptic action seems to reflect the destructive instinct of every proud and jealous soul in the face of a goodness or beauty they cannot themselves possess. In any event, the next verse informs us that "the matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his" (21:11). In other words, Abraham hesitates to stand up to Sarah even when Ishmael's life is at stake; God's reassurance (22:12) does not change the fact that, cowed by her temper, he fails to live up to his primary responsibility as Ishmael's father.[27]

[25] The *JPS Tanakh* masks this implication by translating "for me" as "with me."
[26] *Jewish Study Bible* 44, ad loc. 21:9.
[27] Weiss (2012) nevertheless finds numerous indications in the biblical text that Abraham favors Ishmael over Isaac. If Weiss is correct, Abraham's behavior is all the more disappointing.

The background we have just reviewed is significant in several respects. The weaning of Isaac is immediately followed by the expulsion of Ishmael from the bosom of Abraham, and the exegete's commentary returns repeatedly to the distinction between weaning – a process that lovingly helps a child to achieve greater maturity and independence – and parental abandonment. The exegete thus invites us to read this portion of Genesis as a story about the suffering of children at the hands of adults who are either too cruel to care for them, or, at best, too weak to protect them. (Given the trauma of his childhood, can anyone be surprised that Ishmael became "a wild ass of a man; his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him" [16:12]?) The experience of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 furthermore repeats that of Hagar and Ishmael in the preceding chapter, when Sarah drove them into the wilderness of Beer-sheba. In fact, God seems to have Sarah in mind when he instructs Abraham to take "your son, your only one" to Moriah (22:2), for while Abraham has two sons, Sarah has only one.[28] Finally, Abraham himself could be regarded as a pawn in a conflict between stronger personalities – for the Bible presents God, too, as a potent maternal figure, not to say a jealous one. In announcing to Abraham (then named Abram) that he will be "the father of a multitude of nations," God calls himself El Shaddai (17:1, 4). The meaning of this name is suggested by a play on words at Genesis 49:25, where Jacob prophesies to Joseph that "El Shaddai will bless you with the blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep lying below, blessings of breasts [*shadayim*] and womb."[29] Modern scholars have traced Shaddai to the Akkadian *shadu*, which originally meant "breast" and then – through an imaginative association reflected, for example, in the name "Grand Tetons," French for "big breasts" – came to mean "mountain."[30] YHVH, who calls Abraham up to Mount Moriah, the future site of his Temple, is thus the "God of Breasts," a fertility deity who figuratively suckles his worshippers.[31] But for the exegete, this motherly and nurturing deity is utterly eclipsed in the *Akedah* by the brutality of paternal rejection. It is in this connection that the exegete's imagery proves most telling: far from being "weaned" by God, Abraham and Isaac are separated and abandoned, and left to wander the world as lonely as any orphans.

[28] The *JPS Tanakh* mistranslates "your only son" as "your favored son."
[29] This is the translation of Biale (1982), p. 248.
[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 240–41.
[31] Biale (1982) also speculates that Shaddai is cognate with the Egyptian *shdi*, "a verb meaning 'to suckle'" (p. 249).

In the first of the exegete's stories – all of which begin by mentioning Sarah – Abraham informs Isaac of the purpose of their journey to Mount Moriah. Although "his gaze was gentle, his speech exhortatory," and his words "full of comfort," his son could not understand him. Finally, Abraham pretends to be a murderous idolater so that Isaac will lose faith in him rather than in God. "God in heaven," Isaac cries out, "have mercy on me; God of Abraham have mercy on me, if I have no father on earth, then you be my father!" The commentary explains that, while a mother may blacken her breast to wean a child, "the mother is the same, her gaze is loving and tender as always. Fortunate the one who did not need more frightful measures to wean the child!" (FT 8–9/SKS 4, 107–08). In the scenario the exegete describes, Abraham is compelled to blacken *himself*;[32] Isaac, whom the exegete calls a "boy," is metaphorically "weaned" from his trust in Abraham so roughly and abruptly that he effectively loses his earthly father. At the same time, Isaac seems to draw close to a distant God (or to draw God close to him); in one short sentence, "God in heaven" becomes "God of Abraham" and finally "father." And yet, there is another sense in which Isaac is not weaned at all, and not simply because God takes the place of the parent he has lost. For his prayerful appeal to God rests on a lie his father has fed him – the lie that Abraham himself is responsible for God's dreadful command. Isaac is thus doubly deceived: he mistakes God's actual remoteness for intimacy only because Abraham expresses his genuine love as hatred. Could the exegete have conceived this as a commentary on the infantilization of worshippers through theological interpretations that mask the harshness of the *Akedah* – a harshness he seems to regard as emblematic of life itself?

The exegete's other stories emphasize Abraham's vulnerability and confusion. The second imagines an Abraham who "became old," whose "eyes were darkened," and who "saw joy no more" as a result of his experience on Mount Moriah, even though Isaac – whom the story describes as Sarah's "pride" – "flourished as before." The commentary likens Abraham to a child who has lost its mother not because she covered her breast when it was to be weaned, but "in some other way" (FT 9/SKS 4, 109). The commentary on the third story, in which Abraham agonizes over his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, speaks of the sorrow of a mother who knows that "she and the child [who is to be weaned] are more and more to be parted." "Thus together they mourn this brief sorrow," the exegete remarks. "Fortunate the one who kept the child so close and did not" – like

[32] Kierkegaard states as much in a journal entry, KNJ 2, JJ 87.

Abraham – "need to sorrow more!" (FT 10/SKS 4, 110). The fourth story, in which Isaac loses his faith when he sees "that Abraham's left hand was clenched in despair, that a shudder went through his body" as he drew the knife, is perhaps the bleakest of all. In this scenario, both Abraham and Isaac lose their faith, but are unable even to commiserate: "Never a word is spoken about this in the world. Isaac never spoke to any person about what he had seen, and Abraham did not suspect that anyone had seen it." The exegete's commentary is very brief: "When the child is to be weaned, the mother has more solid food on hand so the child will not perish. Fortunate the one who has this stronger nourishment handy!" (FT 10–11/SKS 4, 111). The implication is that both Abraham and Isaac "perish," for just as God has no sustenance on hand for Abraham when he withholds his spiritual milk, Isaac's faith starves in the presence of his father's absolute hopelessness.

In sum, the exegete, who seems to be unusually sensitive to the experience of parental abandonment, searches in vain in Genesis 22 for the faith he longs for – faith as a life-sustaining intimacy with God that can weather any storm. It is as if, flouting Luther's warning, he hoped to find the loving embrace of Jesus within the inscrutable remoteness of the omnipotent God of creation – aspects of God that were once united in the pious simplicity of his childhood and perhaps also that of the race, before life and experience split them apart. Nor does he avail himself of mediating institutions, such as the rabbinate and the priesthood, that have traditionally helped to connect human beings with God. Little wonder that he fails. The exegete regards Abraham as the "father" of faith, but his encounter with him succeeds only in generating frustration and fatigue (cf. FT 11/SKS 4, 111). Indeed, *his* Abraham seems less than fatherly in every essential respect. Having previously abdicated his paternal responsibility to protect Ishmael, he denies (in the first of the four scenarios) that he is Isaac's father (FT 9). What is more, he is at best capable of producing in Isaac only a childish simulacrum of faith, and one that is furthermore purchased at the price of his son's trust in him. But it is to the exegete's credit that, when it comes to faith, he will be satisfied only with what he regards as the genuine article.

"Attunement" as overture: Silentio's relation to the exegete

One function of the first chapter of *Fear and Trembling* seems to be to attune us to the intellectual and emotional constitution of the book's author. Like the exegete, Silentio has lost the "pious simplicity" of childhood. His primary concern is to understand how a mature comprehension

of the ways of the world can co-exist with a childlike love of life. The "wonder of faith," he writes, is that it "preserves an eternal youth"; full of years and experience, Abraham nevertheless seems to engage life with the joyful expectancy of a child (FT 15/SKS 4, 115). Yet also like the exegete, Silentio cannot "think [him]self into Abraham" (FT 28/SKS 4, 130). He regards Abraham's actions as unintelligible, primarily because they violate the ethical universals or moral norms of reason (cf. FT 47–49/SKS 4, 148–50). But we have already seen that this way of thinking about Abraham's faith is inadequate, because it abstracts from the personal relationship with God in which his faith or trust is rooted. Why, then, does he insist on it?

Part of the answer may be that Silentio, again like the exegete, has no direct acquaintance with God, but knows him only through Scripture. And yet, he indicates that he, too, longs to transcend the "weave of the imagination" – the very fabric of scriptural narrative. The subtitle of *Fear and Trembling*, "A Dialectical Lyric," suggests that the book is both philosophical and poetic. Having asserted, however, that "the present writer is not at all a philosopher," Silentio later insists "I am not a poet and go about things only dialectically" (FT 5, 79/SKS 4, 103, 180). Whatever else this contradiction may imply, Silentio strangely separates intellectual comprehension from storytelling in a way that is foreign to the Bible. This is perhaps not surprising, for he indicates in the Preface that his intellectual model – if this is the right word for a man who both affirms and disavows any connection with philosophers as well as poets – is Descartes, who insisted on a degree of clarity and distinctness in thinking that is generally available only in the disciplines of mathematics and logic. More important, Descartes radically rejected the intellectual tradition, and sought truth by employing "a method," as Silentio remarks, "that had importance only for himself" (FT 4/SKS 4, 101–02). Silentio's embrace of Descartes' example suggests that he is just as intellectually and spiritually isolated as the exegete. Indeed, neither critically engages Jewish or Christian interpretations of the *Akedah*. Silentio's understanding of "attunement" – a word that might be taken to imply an openness and receptivity to the intellectual tradition – is thus narrowly idiosyncratic, for his inquiry takes its keynote from his own curiously detached disposition.[33]

[33] If a direct encounter with the faith of Abraham must involve coming to grips with the Jewish tradition in particular, then we may concur with the assertion of Conway (2003) that Silentio exhibits an "eccentric need" to place himself merely "in the vicinity of faith."

One passage in *Fear and Trembling* decisively establishes the abstraction and emotional bleakness of Silentio's understanding of God and of life as a whole:

> I am convinced that God is love; this thought has for me a primordial lyrical validity. When it is present to me I am unspeakably happy; when it is absent I long for it more intensely than the lover for the object of his love. But I do not believe; this courage I lack. To me, God's love, both in a direct and inverse sense, is incommensurable with the whole of actuality. (FT 28/SKS 4, 129)

This is Silentio's version of the exegete's problem of uniting the remote God of omnipotence with the loving God of revelation. Notice that Silentio is moved, not by the actual experience of God's love, but by the mere *thought* that God is love (cf. FT 29/SKS 4, 130) – a thought that is furthermore evanescent. Indeed, his conviction that God's love is incommensurable with actuality implies that he has neither directly experienced this love, nor expects to do so in this life. On the whole, Silentio seems to have observed, men act as if they did not love God, and events proceed as if God did not love man. The conclusion he draws from this observation, however, rests on the uncertain presupposition that inductive reasoning gives one access to the nature of actuality *as* a whole. Silentio accordingly envisions faith as the solution to a problem that his intellect has posed, but that springs from an experience he seems to share with the exegete – that of abandonment in a cold and uncaring world. This is a far cry from Abraham's faith as personal trust in YHVH. It is thus entirely unsurprising that Silentio, like the exegete, regards Abraham as inscrutable in his joy.

And yet, the present inquiry suggests that the effort of "Attunement" to make audible the dissonance of the *Akedah* may ultimately help the thoughtful reader to overcome Silentio's puzzlement. Of all the Jewish commentators known to me, it is the pre-rabbinic and Hellenistic philosopher Philo who most fully registers this dissonance, and who perhaps also comes closest to understanding the mind of Abraham as he journeys to Moriah. Noting that the name Isaac suggests laughter, Philo asserts that Abraham was prepared to sacrifice to God "the well-tuned emotion [*eupatheia*] and joy of the mind" which "the wise man is said dutifully to offer in sacrifice to God, because to rejoice belongs most of all to God alone":

> For the human race is beset with distress and surrounded by fear of ills either present or expected, so that it is either grieved by unanticipated difficulties close at hand, or agitated by troubles and fears yet to come. But

> the nature of God is free from distress, and without fear, and has no share in any suffering, and alone partakes of perfect happiness and blessedness.[34]

This is a thought worthy of a Greek tragedian. But Philo leaps beyond tragedy when he explains in the immediate sequel that "to the disposition that has made this acknowledgment in truth, God is kind and loving, and, having distanced Himself from any grudge, He fittingly and freely returns the gift [of joy] to the extent that the recipient's capacity allows."[35] In other words, Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son and his laughter is motivated by his recognition that the happiness he enjoys on account of his virtues is *itself* a gift from God. Abraham's humble acknowledgment that he owes his good character to God is thus an act of justice; he is prepared to repay God in kind. But God's response is of a higher order than strict justice. His first gift to Abraham, and to all human beings, is beyond justice, and beyond mercy as well: it is the capacity of goodness itself. God's final, twice-given gift, the life of Isaac, is a repetition of the first one. For had God required the sacrifice of Isaac, he would have confirmed his radical unintelligibility, and thus destroyed the intellectual foundations of human goodness and tranquility alike.

Philo may of course attribute too much resolve to Abraham. In particular, the contemporary Jewish philosopher Howard Wettstein may be right to suppose that Abraham decides neither to obey God, nor to disobey him, but rather "to march forward, not knowing where the path will lead, but ready to follow it, with confidence that he will know what to do when he has to."[36] These interpretations are nevertheless fundamentally in accord. Both grasp the peculiar combination of uncertainty and anticipation in Abraham's cryptic remark that "God will see to the sheep for the burnt offering" (22:8), and both recognize that his greatness lies precisely in advancing toward Moriah full of hope and fear alike, prepared for whatever God may reveal of himself, and with no illusions about the risk he is running.

[34] Philo (1935), §201–02. I have translated the Greek in consultation with Philo (1854).
[35] Philo (1935), §203, my translation. [36] Wettstein (2012), p. 171.

CHAPTER 3

Johannes de silentio's dilemma

Clare Carlisle

Each of the three 'Problems' in *Fear and Trembling* culminates in a dilemma:

(I) During the time before the outcome, either Abraham was a murderer at every moment or we are at a paradox that is higher than all mediations. (FT 58/SKS 4, 159)[1]

(II) Either there is an absolute duty to God . . . —or else faith has never existed because it has always existed, or else Abraham is lost. (FT 71/SKS 4, 171)

(III) Either there is a paradox, that the single individual as the single particular stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, or Abraham is lost. (FT 106/SKS 4, 207)

In each case it seems that Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes de silentio, is attempting to persuade the reader to accept the alternative that involves paradox and an 'absolute duty' to God, and thereby accommodates Abraham. Perhaps for this reason the dilemmatic form of the conclusions to the 'Problems' is usually assumed to be merely rhetorical, and given little attention. But attending more closely to Johannes de silentio's dilemma helps to illuminate *Fear and Trembling* in its historical context, and to clarify how the analysis of Genesis 22 offered in this text differs radically from earlier interpretations.

'Either/or': Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian theology

The dilemmatic form 'either . . . or' signals the immediate intellectual background to Kierkegaard's early work. It echoes, of course, the title of his first major pseudonymous work: *Either/Or* was published a few months

[1] All citations from the text of *Fear and Trembling* refer to *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

before *Fear and Trembling*, in February 1843, and supposedly written by different authors. But this title itself echoes earlier references to 'either/or,' notably in texts by two prominent Danish theologians: Bishop Jakob Peter Mynster and Hans Lassen Martensen. Kierkegaard had a personal connection to both men as well as an interest in their theological work. As Chaplain to Vor Frue Kirke in Copenhagen, Mynster was parish priest to the Kierkegaard family; Søren Kierkegaard heard Mynster preach countless times, and learned much from the bishop about the nature of Christian communication.[2] Kierkegaard was certainly acquainted with Martensen by 1834, for in this year he engaged the theologian – then a junior lecturer in the *Teologiske Fakultet* at the University of Copenhagen – to give him tutorials on Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*. In 1837 Martensen defended his doctoral thesis, *On the Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness*, and shortly after this offered influential lecture courses on 'Speculative Dogmatics' and on 'The History of Modern Philosophy from Kant to Hegel in its Intrinsic Relation to Theology.' Kierkegaard attended some of these lectures, taking notes in his own hand, and he owned notes on the other lectures written by an amanuensis (a common practice at the time, which does not demonstrate that Kierkegaard was absent from these lectures).[3] He undertook intensive study of speculative (or Hegelian) theology during 1837–38, and it was shortly after this time that Mynster and Martensen began to debate the significance of Hegel's contribution to Christian thought. Central to this debate were certain principles of traditional, Aristotelian logic: the law of (non) contradiction, and the law of the excluded middle; in other words, the logic of 'either/or.'

Hegel himself writes in his *Logic* of "the speculative spirit of our language, which transcends the 'either-or' of mere understanding," referring here to the ambiguity inherent in the German word *aufheben*. He explicitly challenges "the law of excluded middle" in claiming that "there is in fact nothing . . . that exhibits the abstract '*either-or*' as it is maintained by the understanding."[4] In Denmark, debate on this issue took a decidedly theological turn.[5] In 1838 F. C. Sibbern, who was Kierkegaard's dissertation advisor, published 'On the Manner in which the Law of Contradiction is Treated in the Hegelian School,' which critically reviews the Hegelian journal *Perseus*, edited by J. L. Heiberg. Sibbern's article was soon followed

[2] See Pattison (2012), pp. 172–79, 186–91. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 47–56.
[4] Hegel (1991), §96, Addition; §119 Addition 2. See Stewart (2003), pp. 184–89.
[5] For a full discussion of this Danish debate and its relevance to Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, see Stewart (2003), pp. 189–95; Carlisle (2005), pp. 39–54.

by an exchange on Hegelian logic in the journal *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, initiated by Bishop Mynster. In his 1839 article 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism,' Mynster challenges the application – under Martensen's growing influence – of Hegelian ideas to theology. Here he argues that rationalism and supernaturalism are not "antiquated standpoints to be overcome" by the new philosophy, but distinct alternative positions that might be adopted by contemporary Christian believers. He concludes by invoking Aristotle's law of the excluded middle to support his argument.[6]

Martensen responded to Mynster in 'Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *principium exclusi medii*,' arguing that the Jewish rejection of Christ rests on the Aristotelian assumption "that the contrary predicates 'God' and 'man' could not be mediated in the self-same subject," while the Christian doctrine of the incarnation involves mediation. He echoes Hegel's remarks on the logical principle of 'either-or' in writing that "Christian metaphysics cannot remain in an either/or, but [it] must find the truth in a third which [the law of the excluded middle] rules out."[7] Elsewhere in his article, Martensen repeats the phrase 'either/or' (*aut/aut*, *enten/eller*), using it to characterize Mynster's insistence on real difference: "Is it not the task of our time to sublate this unhappy either/or?"[8] In 1842 Mynster continued the debate, using a review of books by Herbart and Fichte on Aristotelian logic to respond more robustly to Martensen's Hegelian theology. Mynster here re-emphasizes that theological "concepts" such as theism and atheism, rationalism and supernaturalism, "designate an actual and irresolvable contradiction . . . with respect to the characteristic thing in both points of view, the law of exclusion is valid; either/or: there is no third."[9] One implication of Mynster's argument is that we each face a real and meaningful decision between different worldviews, so that the apparently abstract principle of "the law of exclusion" is closely connected to practical freedom and responsibility.

Through Mynster's exchange with Martensen, then, 'either/or' became a sort of slogan for the critique of attempts to apply Hegelian logic to Christian theology and Christian belief. By invoking 'either/or' as an existential principle in his first major work, Kierkegaard signals his intention to join Mynster in criticizing Martensen's Hegelianism. But if Kierkegaard were the sort of thinker who just contributed to academic debates, we would probably not be reading him today. Indeed, one plausible way of

[6] See Mynster (1839). [7] Martensen (1839), p. 458. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 467.
[9] Mynster (1839), vol. 7, p. 346.

reading *Either/Or* would be as a satire on the Mynster–Martensen debate, in which the aesthete 'A' personifies Hegelian philosophy, and Judge William, who admonishes 'A' to take the 'either/or' of decision seriously, reprises the position taken by Mynster. The implication of this would be the audacious suggestion that the eminent theologian Martensen relates to Christianity in an aesthetic way, while Bishop Mynster relates to it in an ethical way. The sermon on sin-consciousness in the 'Ultimatum' at the end of *Either/Or* indicates a third alternative: relating religiously (or Christianly) to Christianity – that is to say, authentically being a Christian – and this is what Kierkegaard would be denying of two of his country's leading Christian teachers. This would be not merely an attack on these individuals, but, more importantly, a way of calling into question the very conception of Christian identity presupposed by his contemporaries.

Even if this is not exactly what is going on in *Either/Or*, the refusal to simply occupy a clear position within the commonly accepted terms of a debate is a positive feature of Kierkegaard's work in general, and of *Fear and Trembling* in particular. Kierkegaard performs his own kind of dialectical overcoming of the opposing views of others, by focusing not on the views themselves but on the way they are held existentially. Even if a philosophical position, for example, involves a very broad systematic understanding of reality, it may be held in a way that appears to be limited and questionable from a different existential standpoint. So, when we find Johannes de silentio formulating a dilemma in *Fear and Trembling*, we need to examine the nature of the either/or that he is concerned with. The pseudonym calls his text 'A Dialectical Lyric,' after all, and this may mean that his dilemmatic disjunctions are productive of something that moves beyond them in new and surprising ways.

This chapter will show that Johannes de silentio's dilemma presents a twofold challenge to the attempt, by Martensen in particular, to develop a Hegelian theology. First, as we have seen, the dilemmatic form itself constitutes a critique of the structure of Hegelian thought. Second, Johannes de silentio attributes two features to Hegelian theology: admiration of Abraham's faith, and commitment to a self-contained, merely human ethical sphere – and the content of his dilemma indicates that these two features are incompatible. It is illuminating to consider the dilemma in historical perspective, since one of its horns represents a Kantian view of faith, and the other echoes Martin Luther's judgment of Abraham. But while the formulation 'either/or' suggests a need to choose between these alternatives, Johannes de silentio's own analysis of Abraham actually combines aspects of both, yet also moves beyond them. So while the

dilemma posed by *Fear and Trembling* presents a twofold challenge to Hegelian theology, Kierkegaard refuses to let this 'either/or' be the final word on faith.

'Either–': Kantian rationalism

Fear and Trembling emerges from a philosophical context that follows quite closely the scope of Martensen's 1837–38 lectures on the history of modern philosophy, considered in relation to 'speculative dogmatics.' Martensen devoted one of these lectures to Descartes, focusing in particular on the method of systematic doubt. Here he probably repeated the argument developed in his doctoral thesis: that Cartesian doubt inaugurates a narrowly anthropocentric tradition of thinking which was later developed by Kant and Schleiermacher, and which remains within the limits of human subjectivity – a limitation that Hegel's philosophy overcomes. In the Preface to *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de silentio introduces the related themes of doubt and the autonomy of human reason. Here he mentions Descartes – 'a venerable, humble, honest thinker' (FT 3/SKS 4, 101) – but in disputing the idea that the task for nineteenth century thought is to "go further" than Cartesian doubt, he is clearly challenging Martensen.[10]

Just as Martensen's lectures moved on from Descartes to focus on Kant and Hegel as the great proponents of 'modern philosophy,' so Johannes de silentio moves from the existential implications of Cartesian epistemology to the existential implications of Kantian and Hegelian ethics. Kierkegaard scholars have long debated whether the account of the ethical at work in *Fear and Trembling* – and particularly in the three 'Problems' – is primarily Kantian or Hegelian. This debate itself suggests that Johannes de silentio's conception of ethics is plausibly compatible with both deontological universalism and the more regional universalism of communal, customary ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). In both cases, ethical judgment lies within the province of human reason; the difference is that Kant understands reason to be ahistorical and immutable, while Hegel understands it to be historically and socially situated, and therefore changeable. Johannes de silentio does not, however, concern himself with this difference. His critique of 'the ethical' focuses on the idea that this 'sphere' is immanent, autonomous; the idea that "the whole existence of the human race rounds itself off in itself as a perfect sphere and the ethical is at once its limit and its completion." According to such a view, he continues, "God becomes an

[10] See Stewart (2003), pp. 307–10.

invisible vanishing point, an impotent thought, his power being only in the ethical, which completes existence" (FT 59/SKS 4, 160).

While this critique arguably applies to both Kant and Hegel, these two philosophers play quite different roles in *Fear and Trembling*. Johannes de silentio refers to Hegel explicitly at the beginning of each Problem, suggesting that Hegel cannot consistently praise Abraham since Hegelian philosophy provides no justification for this. Here Kierkegaard's pseudonym is not engaging in a direct way with Hegel's own writings, even though he refers to the *Philosophy of Right* in Problem I.[11] In Problem II Johannes de silentio's reference to Hegel is less specific, and by Problem III he is talking vaguely about "the Hegelian philosophy" (FT 71/SKS 4, 172). Although he cannot direct the reader to Hegel's discussion of Abraham, he is clearly arguing that if Hegel were to admire Abraham, then this would be inconsistent with his ethical philosophy. This has the broader implication that Hegelian philosophy cannot accommodate faith, and thus that attempts (such as Martensen's) to develop a speculative theology are misguided.

Although he does not refer to it explicitly, Johannes de silentio has more respect for the Kantian view of Abraham, which is entirely consistent with Kant's account of the relationship between reason and faith, and between ethics and religion. While a purportedly Hegelian interpretation of Abraham is dismissed by the pseudonym, Kant's is offered to the reader as one of the two alternatives comprising the dilemma at the end of each Problem: "Abraham is a murderer . . . Abraham is lost . . . Abraham is lost." And this is a fair summary of Kant's verdict on Abraham's decision to sacrifice Isaac. In his essay *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), Kant argues that a divine revelation, while possible in principle, is not in practice verifiable, and that therefore moral reasoning should always remain the highest arbiter:

> if God should really speak to a human being, the latter could still never *know* that it was God speaking . . . But in some cases the human being can be sure that the voice he hears is *not* God's; for if the voice commands him to do something contrary to the moral law, then no matter how majestic the apparition may be, and no matter how it may seem to surpass the whole of nature, he must consider it an illusion.[12]

Kant adds in a footnote here that "the myth of the sacrifice that Abraham was going to make by butchering and burning his only son at God's command" provides an example to support this principle. He argues that "Abraham should have replied to this supposedly divine voice: 'That

[11] See FT 46–47/SKS 4, 148–49; Stewart (2003), pp. 310–23. [12] Kant (1996a), p. 283.

I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God – of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even if this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven.'"[13] This is perhaps Kant's clearest statement concerning Genesis 22, but it echoes the position he sets out in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793). In Part II of this work, Kant writes that "if something is represented as commanded by God in a direct manifestation of him yet is directly in conflict with morality, it cannot be a divine miracle despite every appearance of being one (e.g. if a father were ordered to kill his son who, so far as he knows, is totally innocent)."[14] Further on, in Part IV – 'Concerning service and counterfeit service under the dominion of the good principle' – Kant discusses the role of conscience in matters of faith, and here he considers "the most perplexing moral decisions."[15] He is concerned primarily with the case of an inquisitor who condemns a heretic to death, but in the course of arguing that taking another's life is certainly wrong, while discerning God's will "is a matter of historical documentation and never apodictically certain," he cites Abraham's story to illustrate the principle that even if a command appears to come from God, the possibility of error always remains.[16] In these passages, Kant shows his respect for theological tradition by emphasizing that the command to Abraham had "every appearance" of coming from God, but nevertheless he is adamant that Abraham was wrong to obey this command and should instead have used his moral reason to discern its inauthenticity.

Of course, this assessment of Abraham sits within the broader context of Kant's critical philosophy, and exemplifies his view that morality provides a ground for religious faith and not vice versa. Stepping back from this, one might say that despite the explicitly Christian character of Kant's philosophy, its emphasis on the moral law draws God within the sphere of human practical reason. This, indeed, is the interpretation offered by Martensen in both his doctoral dissertation and the series of lectures followed by Kierkegaard. Martensen devoted at least five of his 1837–38 lectures to Kantian thought, and Kierkegaard's notes on these record that Martensen discussed the distinction between "objective" (or theoretical) and "subjective" (or moral) approaches to the question of God's existence, and commented that Kant's "regulative" understanding of God is "a volatilization of the idea of faith."[17] According to Martensen, Kant's "subjectivism" suggests that God is posited by those who believe in

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 283. [14] *Ibid.*, p. 100. [15] *Ibid.*, p. 178. [16] *Ibid.*, pp. 179–80.
[17] Pattison (2012), p. 51.

him – a view that cannot accommodate divine grace.[18] More directly relevant to the case of Abraham is Martensen's discussion of conscience in his dissertation. Kant's account of conscience as "the immediate judgment of practical reason over the action's moral worth," Martensen argues here, means that "the human assumes God's place in the most holy sanctuary of the soul and glorifies itself but not God."[19]

As Martensen's lectures were delivered just a few months after the defense of his thesis, it is likely that Kierkegaard heard him express this sort of assessment of Kantian thought. In any case, Martensen's analysis of the Kantian position seems to be echoed in Johannes de silentio's comments at the beginning of Problem II that if "the ethical is the universal and as such in turn the divine," then God is "understood in an entirely abstract sense as the divine," so that in fact "God becomes an invisible vanishing point, an impotent thought, his power being only in the ethical, which completes existence" (FT 59/SKS 4, 160). It is this position, of course, that underlies the first horn of Johannes de silentio's dilemma: "Abraham is lost." But while Martensen argued that his Hegelian 'speculative dogmatics' overcomes Kant's subjectivism, Johannes de silentio is suggesting that Kant's view at least has consistency and integrity, while Martensen's position is incoherent and disingenuous – and falls into the same despairing, hubristic denial of divine transcendence anyway.

'Or–': Lutheran fideism

Within the post-Kantian milieu that forms the philosophical context for *Fear and Trembling*, it is perhaps F. H. Jacobi who occupies the position represented in the second horn of Johannes de silentio's dilemma. Jacobi played a crucial role in the so-called 'Atheism Controversy' that brought to a head the theological implications of German idealism, in the form of Fichte's forced resignation from the University of Jena. When Fichte's position was threatened, Jacobi published an 'Open Letter to Fichte' which avowed personal friendship and admiration while condemning Fichte's philosophy as nihilistic. The immediate consequence of this friendly intervention was to seal Fichte's fate, but in broader historical view Jacobi is credited with an early use of the term 'nihilism' – which would, of course, become a dominant concept in modern thought.[20] Fichte's theological position takes Kantianism a step further (or arguably makes its implications more explicit) in arguing that philosophy cannot

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 52. [19] Martensen (1997), p. 108. [20] Cunningham (2013), pp. 325–44.

prove the existence of God and that "faith" concerns the "revelation" of duty and of a "moral world-order." "This is the true faith; this moral order is what we accept as divine," writes Fichte in his 1798 article 'On the basis of our Faith in a Divine Governance of the World.' More radically still: "That living and effective moral order is itself God, we need no other God and cannot apprehend any other."[21] Jacobi describes Fichte's idealism as "a thoroughly immanent philosophy, a true system of reason" in which "everything ... must be given and already contained in the I as I, in I-ness alone."[22] Jacobi insists that this is misguided because the human being stands in a relation of dependence to whatever possesses truth – that is, to God – which must be "more than I, better than I, a wholly other. I am not, and I may not be, if He is not!"[23]

During the 1830s, the intellectual legacy of the Atheism Controversy was probably unavoidable for students of theology at the University of Copenhagen. In his 1837–8 lectures, Martensen contrasted Kant with Jacobi, whose account of faith emphasizes "the gracious presence of God in the believer's ... consciousness."[24] In the same notebook used to record Martensen's lectures on speculative dogmatics, Kierkegaard wrote notes on J. E. Erdmann's published lectures on 'Faith and Knowledge delivered as an Introduction to Dogmatics and the Philosophy of Religion' (1837). Kierkegaard's notes show his interest in Erdmann's critical discussion of "superstitious dogmatism": he refers here to Tertullian and Jacobi as representatives of fideism.[25] Kierkegaard criticizes Fichte in his dissertation *On the Concept of Irony* (1841), and he echoes Jacobi's objections to the immanence of the kind of idealism proposed by Fichte in his later published works, both signed and pseudonymous.[26]

Within *Fear and Trembling*, the Fichte–Jacobi debate can be discerned in the background to Johannes de silentio's dilemma. This is not to say that the pseudonym's complex account to faith is indebted to Jacobi, but rather to recognize that in this text the significance of faith is brought into relief by the advancing threat of nihilism. This is most vividly invoked at the beginning of Johannes de silentio's 'Tribute to Abraham':

> If there were no eternal consciousness in a human being, if underlying everything there were only a wild, fermenting force writhing in dark

[21] Lindau (1921), pp. 31–32. Cited in Pattison (2012), p. 85.
[22] Lindau (1921), p. 167; Pattison (2012), p 85. [23] Lindau (1921), p. 178; Pattison (2012), p. 89.
[24] Pattison (2012), p. 51.
[25] See SKS 19/KJN 3, NB 4, pp. 145–69/143–66; Pattison (2012), pp. 36–38.
[26] See Pattison (2012), pp. 82–101; Rasmussen (2009), pp. 33–50.

> passions that produced everything great and insignificant, if a bottomless, insatiable emptiness lurked beneath everything, what would life be but despair? If such were the case, if there were no sacred bond that tied humankind together, if one generation after another rose like leaves in the forest, if one generation succeeded another like the singing of birds in the forest, if the human race passed through the world as a ship through the sea, as the wind through the desert, a thoughtless and futile activity, if an eternal oblivion always hungrily lay in wait for its prey and there were no power strong enough to snatch it away – then how empty and hopeless life should be! (FT 12/SKS 4, 112)

This passage engages most directly (and somewhat prophetically) with a nihilistic naturalism rather than with the moral faith espoused by thinkers like Kant and Fichte. The Atheism Controversy concerned the nature rather than the existence of the "sacred bond" that unites human beings. However, Johannes de silentio's warning here about the futility of life "if . . . there were no power strong enough to snatch [eternal oblivion] away" anticipates his claim that a God inseparable from the moral order is merely "an impotent thought." Furthermore, in 'A Preliminary Outpouring from the Heart' he writes that while "an eternal divine order prevails [in] the world of spirit," "there is a form of knowledge that presumptuously wants to introduce into the world of spirit the same law of indifference under which the external world sighs" (FT 21–22/SKS 4, 123). This "form of knowledge" refers quite broadly to the subjectivism of modern philosophy, and probably more specifically to Martensen's speculative theology, which is repeatedly charged with presumptuousness and arrogance in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works. Johannes de silentio argues that such philosophical 'knowledge' "thinks it knows enough to know the great; other work is not needed. But that is why it gets no bread; it perishes from hunger while everything is transmuted into gold. And what does it really know?" (FT 22/SKS 4, 124). These images of spiritual starvation and of a world drained of meaning indicate the nihilistic consequences that follow from modern philosophies of immanence and autonomy.

Both the Preface and the Epilogue to *Fear and Trembling* pose the question of the value of faith.[27] The threat of nihilism contributes to a strategic answer to this question, one which raises the stakes of the interpretation of Abraham by offering a bleak vision of a world without faith, or more precisely a world in which faith no longer seems the essential task of the good life. It is faith, Johannes de silentio suggests, that offers an

[27] See Carlisle (2010), pp. 21–24, 29–39, 171–73.

alternative to nihilistic despair – and thus by the example of his faith Abraham becomes "a guiding star that rescues the anguished" (FT 18/SKS 4, 117). But the account of faith indicated by the second horn of the pseudonym's dilemma more directly echoes Lutheran fideism than Jacobi's view, not least because Johannes de silentio follows Luther in articulating this fideism through a close and creative reading of Genesis 22.

In his 1518 *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther accentuates aspects of Abraham's story that will be familiar to readers of *Fear and Trembling*. He argues that Abraham's faith is "impossible" to understand: "[his] trial cannot be overcome and is far too great to be understood by us. For there is a contradiction with which God contradicts Himself."[28] Luther anticipates the Kantian critique of Genesis 22 by imagining Abraham consulting his conscience, and reasoning – not according to the moral law, but according to a common-sense principle of consistency – "'This is not a command of God; it is a trick of Satan. For God's promise is sure, clear and beyond doubt: From Isaac you will have descendants.'" Luther acknowledges that "human reason would simply conclude either that the promise is lying or that the command is not God's but the devil's. For there is a plain contradiction."[29] However, he is not just making a philosophical point about intellectual comprehension, but also highlighting the emotional impact and the existential significance of Abraham's situation. "Abraham's heart was wounded far more deeply now than previously, when he cast out Ishmael," he writes, "but it is impossible for us to comprehend the greatness of this trial. Isaac had the promise of the future blessing. Therefore the command to kill him was all the more painful."[30] But Luther makes it clear that what is at stake here is not only the difference between Isaac living and dying, but also the difference between spiritual life and death: between hope and "despair," which "nearly all people are tempted by."[31]

Luther's interpretation of the biblical text articulates an imaginative engagement with Abraham which brings out the existential significance of the divine command and the journey to Moriah. "I have said ... that we cannot comprehend this trial; but we can observe and imagine it from afar, so to speak,"[32] writes Luther. Ironically, this 'observation from afar' comes closer to Abraham than the biblical account, which focuses entirely on Abraham's actions and says nothing of his experience. Luther is interested in what Johannes de silentio would call 'inward movements': "What

[28] Luther (1964), p. 93. [29] *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 95. [30] *Ibid.*, p. 92. [31] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

do you suppose the sentiments of Abraham's heart were in this situation?"[33] When he comes to Genesis 22:10 – *Then Abraham put forth his hand and took his knife to slay his son* – he elaborates this stark verse by envisaging how Isaac was bound, "just as a butcher binds a sheep or a goat with a rope and grasps the animal with one hand and holds the knife in the other," but at the same time he turns away from the scene, as if he were compelled to watch the sacrifice but also unable to do so. "I could not have been an onlooker," writes Luther, "much less the performer and slayer."[34]

Johannes de silentio offers a repetition of this Lutheran exegesis, taking up its key elements in the intellectual context of post-Kantian philosophy, the Atheism Controversy, and nineteenth-century Danish theology. Like Luther, Kierkegaard's pseudonym argues that neither theoretical nor practical reason can make sense of Abraham's actions without condemning them as murder; like Luther, he situates himself imaginatively on Mount Moriah and poetically reconstructs Abraham's inwardness; like Luther, he refuses to rush to the story's happy ending, and accentuates the intense suffering that accompanies Abraham's faith; like Luther he confesses that he could not have done what Abraham did. In *Fear and Trembling* these points are closely tied to the question of the value of faith that is addressed explicitly in the text's Preface and Epilogue. Johannes de silentio suggests that faith's value is a function of its difficulty (although it is also more than this): in a complacent age which assumes Christian identity as a matter of course, and more specifically as a matter of birthright for Danish citizens, it is important to show that faith is in fact the highest and most demanding task of existence.

Beyond the dilemma: the courage of faith

We have seen that the two alternatives presented in Johannes de silentio's dilemma echo the contrasting verdicts on Abraham offered by Kant and Luther. We have also seen that the dilemma holds apart two features that Johannes attributes to Hegelian theology: admiration of Abraham's faith, and commitment to a self-contained, merely human ethical sphere. The dilemmatic form therefore has a polemical function: it invokes an 'either/or' to challenge the kind of theology developed by Martensen. It also has a function more oriented to existential communication, for it presents an uncompromising choice to the reader that concerns not only *the*

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 98. [34] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

philosophical–theological question of the age, but also the more personal, spiritual question of the reader's own relationship to God.

Neither of these aspects of the dilemma undermines the idea that Johannes de silentio is advocating one of the two alternatives contained within it. The fact that *Fear and Trembling* repeats many of the elements of Luther's exegesis of Genesis 22, while rejecting the kind of immanence associated with Kantian moral philosophy, has led many readers to conclude that Johannes de silentio wants his readers to choose the fideistic, Lutheran horn of his dilemma. This would mean that in different circumstances Johannes might have articulated his interpretation of Genesis 22 by arguing that Kant's rejection of Abraham is wrong and that Luther's endorsement of Abraham is right. Two consequences follow directly from this reading: Johannes de silentio is unequivocally praising Abraham, the hero of his text, and he is thereby advocating a 'divine command' ethic, as Luther undoubtedly does.

But both of these points need to be challenged. It becomes clear that Johannes de silentio does not share Luther's divine command ethic when we recognize that his account of faith takes elements from both the Kantian and the Lutheran alternatives. On the question of the relationship between Abraham's faith and 'the ethical,' the pseudonym entirely agrees with Kant's view that Abraham's actions are ethically abhorrent. Indeed, he makes this a central feature of his own interpretation of Genesis 22, accentuating it in the three 'Problems.' If Johannes de silentio espoused a divine command ethic, then he would not need to insist on a "teleological suspension of the ethical" (FT 58/SKS 4, 159) in order to justify Abraham – and he would follow Luther in pointing to Abraham's obedience to the divine command as his greatest achievement and the clearest indication of his faith.

In fact, it is precisely on the issue of obedience that Johannes de silentio moves beyond the alternatives presented by Kant and Luther. Although these thinkers propose contrasting assessments of Abraham's faith, they share the fundamental view that this faith consists in obedience. Kant criticizes Abraham for being uncritically, unquestioningly obedient; Luther praises him for this very reason. Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* repeatedly emphasize that the defining characteristic of faith is obedience, and that this is what Abraham exemplifies to the highest degree: "This is an extraordinary example and a description of perfect obedience ... there was never an apostle, a patriarch or a martyr who could have shown this obedience so unwaveringly"; "Abraham's extraordinary obedience ... extended to his innermost being"; "With the exception of Christ we have

no similar example of obedience."[35] The Kantian critique of Abraham questions the value of this obedience from a certain epistemological and moral perspective, arguing that human fallibility on empirical questions makes any submission to external authority inherently problematic. The Lutheran and Kantian verdicts on Abraham fit so readily into a dilemma because they represent opposing views within a common framework, according to which Abraham's faith demonstrates ready and perfect obedience to the will of God.

Johannes de silentio, by contrast, rejects the idea that obedience is the distinguishing mark of Abraham's faith. This is clear from the comparisons he draws between faith and its alternatives. In 'Tuning Up' he presents four possible scenarios in which Abraham obeys the divine command and yet lacks faith. His 'Tribute to Abraham' lists qualities that make for spiritual greatness: these include love, expectancy, struggle, power, wisdom and hope, but not obedience. More clearly still, the contrast between resignation and faith drawn in 'A Preliminary Outpouring from the Heart' indicates that faith does not consist in obedience. Although the movement of resignation allows for perfect obedience, it falls short of faith:

> By resignation I renounce everything . . . By faith I do not renounce anything; on the contrary, by faith I receive everything . . . A purely human courage is required to renounce the whole of temporality in order to gain the eternal . . . But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage next to grasp the whole of temporality by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac. (FT 41/SKS 4, 142)

Johannes de silentio amplifies this suggestion that courage, rather than obedience, is the distinctive characteristic of Abraham's faith when he confesses his own inability to demonstrate such faith. "I know very well," he writes, "that my courage still is not the courage of faith and is nothing to be compared with that. I cannot make the movement of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and plunge confidently into the absurd; that for me is an impossibility" (FT 28/SKS 4, 129).

The suggestion that courage, rather than obedience, is the central virtue of faith evidently has a theological significance. When pride is understood as the fundamental form of sinfulness – as for Augustine, and also for Luther – then submissive obedience must be the quality that opposes this, and thus the primary feature of faith. But if fear is the fundamental form of

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 109, 114.

sinfulness[36] – as Kierkegaard's pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis suggests in *The Concept of Anxiety* – then courage becomes the primary virtue of faith. In fact, Kierkegaard thought that fear (or cowardice) and pride are intimately related,[37] and from a psychological point of view it certainly makes sense to say that both pride and fear prevent us from loving, and that therefore both are integral to sin. And, indeed, Johannes de silentio refers not just to the courage of faith, but also to *humble courage*, which is a virtue that responds to both pride and fear. He emphasizes in Problem II that "the courage of faith is the only humble courage" (FT 64/SKS 4, 164), having introduced this idea of humble courage in his 'Preliminary Outpouring.' Nevertheless, the nineteenth-century religious situation that *Fear and Trembling* addresses may provide specific reasons to argue that courage needs to be emphasized as the preeminent virtue of faith. For when Kierkegaard diagnoses his age as the 'age of despair,' he emphasizes the 'despair of weakness' that evades the God-relationship, whether through speculative philosophy or through bourgeois complacency.[38] If, as Kierkegaard's texts often suggest, contemporary Danes were blindly going through the motions of religiousness by following conventional practices, then calling attention to Abraham's obedience may not be sufficiently disruptive to awaken readers from their spiritual slumbers. But Johannes de silentio's provocative emphasis on 'fear and trembling' and on the radical courage of faith offers a wake-up call to all would-be Christians dozing through their Sunday sermon (see FT 45/SKS 4, 146).

All this suggests that the account of faith put forward in *Fear and Trembling* cannot fit into the terms of the dilemma posed by Johannes de silentio at the end of each Problem. Viewed as a response to Hegelian theology, the dilemma presents a positive thesis, for it shows that admiration for Abraham's faith is not compatible with an immanent philosophy in which ethical responsibility is inseparable from religious life. Johannes tries to invalidate the entire project of Hegelian theology by showing that only one of these two elements can be maintained. *Either* the Kantian view *or* the Lutheran view is consistent, he is suggesting, but it is simply confusion to present a defense of Abraham's faith within the post-Kantian immanentist paradigm. But while the dilemma fulfills the function of critique against the Hegelian project, neither of the alternatives it presents

[36] See Milbank (1996), pp. 298–321. [37] See FT 64/SKS 4, 164–65; EUD 354; KW 8, 145.
[38] See Pattison (2012), pp. 136–49. Contrasting Kierkegaard with Barth, Pattison argues that the despair of the present age "is so far from being a condition of collective Prometheanism as to be a collective manifestation of the 'feminine' despair of weakness."

is endorsed by Johannes de silentio. He certainly takes several important elements from the Lutheran interpretation of Abraham, and he also agrees with Kant that on ethical grounds Abraham must be rejected as a murderer. However, his own exegesis of Genesis 22 suggests an account of faith that is fundamentally different from both of these earlier interpretations in claiming that although obedience is a necessary prerequisite for faith, it is not a sufficient condition for faith. Something even more difficult is required: receiving back as a gift what has been obediently relinquished. At the heart of faith, according to Johannes de silentio, is "the great mystery that it is far more difficult to receive than to give" (FT 91/SKS 4, 193). If this difficulty is a measure of faith's value, then raising the value of faith involves questioning the idea that it is only a matter of submission to a divine command and showing that, more than this, faith involves the "paradoxical and humble courage" to "receive a son a second time contrary to expectation" (FT 7/SKS 4, 107).

Although Johannes de silentio seems to echo Luther in admitting that he could not have done what Abraham did, this reflection on his incapacity for faith has quite different implications. Luther treats Abraham's case as exemplifying faith, understood as obedience to God, to an extraordinary degree, and it is this degree that he sees as beyond his own capacity. By contrast, Johannes de silentio suggests that Abraham's case exemplifies the structure of faith itself, clarified as qualitatively different from resignation, so that his own failure to attain the faith of Abraham is a failure to have faith at all. This means that Johannes' claim that he cannot make the movements of faith (see FT 31, 42, 44/SKS 4, 132, 143, 145), for "this courage I lack" (FT 28/SKS 4, 129) implies something more radical than Luther's admission that he "could not have been . . . the performer and slayer" on Mount Moriah.

Of course, one important difference between Johannes de silentio and Martin Luther is that the former is not only a pseudonym, but also a character within the text attributed to him. It is true that Luther brings himself into his interpretation of Abraham precisely by commenting on his inability to watch or to repeat the preparations for the sacrifice, and of course it is also true that the nature of authorship is not necessarily straightforward in non-pseudonymous texts. Nevertheless, Johannes de silentio's peculiar authorial status informs his relationship to Abraham in a way that is different from Luther's. His insistence that he lacks the faith of Abraham casts an interesting light on his remarks about the relationship between hero and poet in 'A Tribute to Abraham' and in Problem III, which are closely tied to the issue of salvation from nihilistic despair.

Indeed, these remarks help to indicate the significance of the text's pseudonymity. *Fear and Trembling* by S. Kierkegaard and *Fear and Trembling* by Johannes de silentio are substantially the same book – that is, they consist of the same words – and yet while the latter text has Abraham as its hero and Johannes as its poet, the former text has two protagonists, Abraham and Johannes, and Kierkegaard as its poet. The manner in which Abraham qualifies as a hero remains problematic in both versions (unlike in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*), whereas Johannes de silentio is Kierkegaard's hero insofar as he understands not only the difficulty of faith's movements but also his inability to accomplish them. If Abraham was extraordinary among his contemporaries, Johannes is exceptional in his own age in realizing that he lacks faith, while all around him are under the illusion of possessing it. He is thus a Socratic figure within the text, questioning Christian identity not just through a theoretical discussion of what faith consists in, but also through his refusal to claim this identity for himself.

The possibility that Johannes de silentio is the real hero of *Fear and Trembling* makes sense of the text's enigmatic epigraph about Tarquin the Proud: Johannes, like Tarquin's son, is a messenger who does not understand his own message, for he does not understand that he is a hero as well as a poet. If the courage of faith is a "paradoxical and humble courage" – and in this respect to be contrasted with "heroic courage" (FT 91/SKS 4, 192–193) – then Johannes de silentio's heroism is likewise paradoxical in that it involves recognition of his lack of courage. And if Abraham remains a "guiding star rescues that saves the anguished," then Kierkegaard's pseudonym is himself an unorthodox and unwitting role model for contemporary Christians who need to be guided through the task of questioning their Christian identity and thereby embarking on the "task" of faith that is "sufficient for a lifetime" (FT 108/SKS 4, 209).

CHAPTER 4

Can an admirer of silentio's Abraham consistently believe that child sacrifice is forbidden?

C. Stephen Evans

In Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, the pseudonymous author, Johannes de silentio, argues that either it must be true that religious faith can justify Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac on God's command (as described in the biblical story in Genesis 22) or else Abraham is a murderer. The conclusion silentio defends has a disjunctive character, and he frequently admits that a person can reasonably deny that it could ever be right to kill one's child, even if God commanded the act. However, such a person must, on pain of inconsistency, condemn Abraham. For example, in considering Problem I (whether there is such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical), silentio admits the possibility that Hegel is right in claiming that the individual who as an individual puts himself above "the universal" thereby does wrong. However, silentio argues that consistency requires that in making such a judgment, Hegel condemns Abraham's action in being willing to sacrifice Isaac, since such an action is surely not something that can be seen as universal. Hegel's view implies that Abraham "ought to have been remanded and exposed as a murderer" (FT 47/SKS 4, 149).[1]

It appears then that silentio wants to put some of his readers, namely Jews and Christians who revere Abraham as the "father of faith," in a difficult spot. If they regard Abraham as an exemplar of faith, someone to be imitated, as did the writer of *Hebrews*, who describes Abraham as one of the heroes of faith, then it appears they must be willing to judge that Abraham acted rightly in being willing to sacrifice Isaac at the command of God. However, if Abraham was right in his actions, consistency seems to demand that the same judgment of approval be given to a hypothetical contemporary who has received a similar command from God. Of course secular readers may feel no strain here; many will unhesitatingly judge both that Abraham was wrong in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac and that a

[1] All citations from the text of *Fear and Trembling* refer to *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

contemporary who intended such an action would be morally in the wrong. However, the choice is not so easy for those still committed to a religious tradition that venerates Abraham. Silentio in effect challenges such readers either to give up their admiration for Abraham or else admit the possibility that genuine faith might require a person to sacrifice a child.

The latter disjunct is certainly not easy to accept. I believe that most sane people of faith today, if they are honest, would admit that if a neighbor told them he intended to sacrifice one of his children because God had asked him to do so, they would quickly and without hesitation call the police. This is certainly what I myself would do. It is important to remember that such cases are not merely hypothetical. On May 9, 2003, a woman named Deanna Lacy, in Tyler, Texas, killed two of her children with a rock, claiming that God had told her to do this. Her lawyer, rightly in my view, argued that this belief on her part was itself evidence of insanity.

Silentio stresses the difficulty faced by a reader who admires Abraham's actions, and does not want to give us religious readers any easy way out. We should not, for example, take comfort in a euphemistic redescription of Abraham's action, as when someone says that the great thing about Abraham was that he was willing to give God "the best" (FT 22–23/SKS 4, 124–25). It is true that Isaac was the best thing Abraham had, but this description obscures the duty Abraham had to love and protect his son.

Another stratagem silentio tries to rule out is to appeal to the result or outcome of Abraham's action: It is true that in the end Abraham does not actually have to perform the act and gets to keep Isaac. The problem with this strategy is that someone who admires Abraham and wants to imitate his action must take into account the fact that when Abraham formed the intention to sacrifice Isaac, he did not know the result. Thus, someone who really wants to imitate Abraham must be willing to act as Abraham did without knowing the result:

> If the one who is to act wants to judge himself by the outcome, then he will never begin. Even though the outcome may delight the whole world, it cannot help the hero, for he only came to know the outcome when the whole thing was over, and he did not become a hero by that but by the fact that he began. (FT 55/SKS 4, 156)

Silentio thinks that the familiarity most religious people have with the story obscures its shocking power, and he wants to force his readers to feel that power again. We should not, for example, thoughtlessly think that Abraham fits in some special category as a "great man," who is thereby permitted to do what is forbidden to ordinary folks: "If faith cannot make

it a holy act to be willing to murder one's son, then let the same judgment be passed upon Abraham as upon anyone else" (FT 24/SKS 4, 126).

One tempting way of lessening the problem is to appeal to differences between the historical situation of Abraham and our contemporary situation. Perhaps, for example, we might decide, based on critical, historical biblical scholarship, that Abraham never performed any such action as riding out to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac. Silentio argues that if we appeal to historical criticism in this way, then we are simply emptying the story of Abraham of any religious importance for us. Abraham can in such a case no longer be an exemplar of faith to be imitated: "Or perhaps Abraham did not do what is narrated there at all, perhaps due to circumstances of the time it was something entirely different; then let us forget him, for what is worthwhile in remembering a past that cannot become a present" (FT 24/SKS 4, 126). Despite silentio's attempt to head off this strategy, I shall ultimately argue that a solution to the problem does require some heed to historical differences between Abraham's situation and our own. However, as will become clear, I shall also try to honor silentio's desire to maintain the contemporary relevance of the Abraham story. In any case it is obvious that, even if the story is fictional, we can still make moral judgments about the actions performed by Abraham, whether Abraham is a historical person or a character in a story.

I agree with silentio that it is difficult to be an admirer of Abraham. However, the high cost of admiring Abraham does *not* include a willingness to judge a contemporary case of child sacrifice to be praiseworthy. I shall defend two theses: (1) It is possible consistently to hold that Abraham's act was admirable, and yet be confident that a contemporary who believes he or she has been asked by God to sacrifice a child is deluded; (2) thesis (1) does not empty the story of Abraham of its contemporary religious power. The defense of thesis (1) will require me to exploit historical differences between the Abraham case and the contemporary cases that appear on the surface to be similar. The defense of thesis (2) will require me to argue that, despite the historical disanalogies between Abraham and a contemporary, there are still crucial analogies that remain, analogies which allow Abraham to continue to be an exemplar of faith to be admired and imitated.

Should we always obey God's commands?

I first want to argue that the judgment that a contemporary person who believes God has asked him to sacrifice a child is deluded does not require

one to deny that God has an absolute right to be obeyed. The idea that God has an absolute right to be obeyed, and thus that it is always right to obey God's commands, I shall call the principle of divine moral authority. Logically, the conditional proposition (a) "If God commanded me to sacrifice a child, it would be right for me to sacrifice a child" is consistent with (b) "God would never ask me to sacrifice a child." If I believe (b), then I can consistently believe (a) while holding that the antecedent of (a) will never be satisfied. I could even believe in the truth of (a) while holding that (b) is logically necessary, and thus that it is logically impossible for antecedent in (a) to be satisfied. (Though someone who believes God did in fact ask Abraham to perform such an action cannot go so far.) If I believe (b) this allows me to call the police if my neighbor lets me know he intends to kill one of his children at God's command, even though I may still believe it would be right for my neighbor to do such an action if God commanded it. If I do not believe God has in fact made such a command (or perhaps, more strongly, if I believe God would never make such a command), then I can do what I can to stop my neighbor while still accepting the principle that God has divine moral authority.

Why accept the principle of divine moral authority? Whether one should accept such a principle surely depends partly on what one believes about God. If one believes, as the Christian tradition has generally affirmed, that God is necessarily good and loving, and that God is omniscient, then it is easy to see why God's commands should be obeyed. Any commands God gives would have to be directed at the good and motivated by love if God is necessarily good and loving. Furthermore, if God is omniscient, his commands would not only aim at the good, but they would also surely direct those commanded toward the good in supremely wise ways, since an omniscient being could not fail to know what means of achieving the good are going to be effective. So anyone who accepts the traditional picture of God as good, loving, and omniscient has good reason to accept the principle of divine moral authority.

Besides such considerations, it also seems that someone who admires Abraham and judges Abraham's action in being willing to sacrifice Isaac to be right and admirable must accept some such principle. Unless it is always right to obey God's commands, it is hard to imagine what could justify Abraham in acting in this way. One would think that if there are any cases in which it would be right to disobey God's command, the Abraham story would be among them. For such an admirer of Abraham who wishes to call the police on his deranged neighbor, the issue is not whether it would be right to obey God if he issued a command to kill a child; all of God's

commands should be obeyed. The crucial issue is whether one should believe that God might issue such a command.

How Abraham's situation differs from our own: (1) the epistemic difference

There are two important differences between silentio's Abraham and a contemporary person (imagined or actual) who thinks God has commanded a child to be killed. The first important difference is epistemic: silentio portrays Abraham as *knowing* that God has asked him to sacrifice Isaac. It is, however, difficult to imagine a contemporary person who could *know* that God has asked him to perform such an act.[2]

The importance of this epistemic issue is already clear in Immanuel Kant's treatment of this issue. "Abraham should have replied to this supposedly divine voice: 'That I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God—of that I am not certain, and never can be, even if this voice rings down to me from heaven.'"[3] For Kant I can know with certainty that it is wrong for a father to kill his son, since moral knowledge is a priori and founded on pure practical reason, but I could never know with certainty that a voice from heaven (or within one's head) was the voice of God, particularly if that voice told me to do something immoral.

This is emphatically not how Johannes de silentio tells the story. To the contrary, silentio assumes throughout the book that Abraham knows that God has asked him to take Isaac's life. Readers of *Fear and Trembling* sometimes miss this point, because it is almost impossible for us to imagine ourselves in the situation in which he describes Abraham as being placed. When we read the book, we wonder how Abraham could know such a thing, and we tend to imagine the "fear and trembling" in terms of our own epistemic anxieties. However, if we read the book carefully, we will see that silentio's Abraham has no such epistemic worries. He does not agonize over whether it is really God who has asked him to do this. Rather, he agonizes over whether he should do what God has asked him to do. Actually, he does not agonize over this either, because, as silentio portrays

[2] Let me say that nothing hinges on the use of the verb "know" in this context. I use it to indicate only that in the story as silentio tells it, it is true that God has asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and Abraham is aware of this truth and has no doubt about it. If anyone doubts that Abraham's epistemic state should be described as knowledge, he or she should substitute some other acceptable term, such as "justified belief" or even "confident belief."

[3] Kant (1998), n. 283 (Ak VII, p. 63).

him, he has perfect faith in God. Perhaps what we should say is that *if* Abraham did not have faith, he would agonize over whether he should perform the act. However, he seems to have no doubt about what God has asked him to do.

Silentio is careful not to give us any account of how Abraham is supposed to know that God has given him this command. I suspect he realizes that if he gave such an account, our epistemological instincts would immediately kick in and we would question whether Abraham really knows what he thinks he knows. So silentio simply puts this into the "frame" of the story. As he tells the story, God has asked this of Abraham, and Abraham knows that God has asked this of him, and that is the end of this part of the story. Presumably, Abraham has heard God speak before, and has in some way learned to recognize God's voice, just as he has learned to trust God. However, silentio tells us nothing about how Abraham recognizes God's voice, just as he tells us nearly nothing about how Abraham acquired his trust in God. He just presupposes Abraham knows it is God who has asked this of him.

Why does he tell the story this way? I suspect it is because he wants to turn our attention away from epistemology. He does not want us to ask "How does Abraham know that God has asked him to do this?" He wants us to consider a different question: "Assuming that Abraham knows that God has asked him to do this, is it right for him to act in this way?"

We live, as I have already noted, in an epistemological age. Debates in philosophy of religion and theology tend to focus on epistemological issues: Is there enough evidence for the existence of God? Are there good reasons to take a text such as the Bible to be an authentic revelation from God? If people have doubts about religion, the grounds for the doubt must be intellectual in origin. Kierkegaard, however, is suspicious of modern philosophy's preoccupation with epistemology. Rightly or wrongly, he thinks that much of our preoccupation with epistemology is rationalization. The real problem with modernity is that we do not accept God's authority; we are not people of faith, not because we lack evidence, but because we do not want to obey God. With those suspicions, it is not surprising that his pseudonym silentio wants to focus on the question, "Should Abraham obey God *if* God asked him to kill his son?" rather than the question "How does Abraham *know* that God has asked him to kill his son?"

Perhaps silentio wants his readers to ask the following question: "Would *I* obey God if I knew for sure he had asked me to do something?" Of course, given our epistemic obsessions, one might think we would never find ourselves in such a situation. However, we should remember that

silentio is addressing readers in Christendom, nearly all baptized and catechized Lutherans. As such, those readers are at least nominally already committed to the view that God *has* spoken to them through Jesus and the Scriptures. (There are in fact lots of hints in *Fear and Trembling* that the story of Abraham is treated to raise questions for contemporary Christians who claim to believe the Bible is God's word.)

Nor is it an idle question for silentio to ask whether his readers really are willing to obey what God tells them to do in Scripture. After all, the Scriptures, as Kierkegaard understands them, tell us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and also that all humans are our neighbors. It is by no means obvious that it is easy for committed Christians (or anyone else) to fulfill this command, and lots of reasons to suspect that human beings will look for reasons not to obey it. Hence, it makes sense that silentio might "bracket" the epistemological questions about how one might know God was speaking, and pose the question as to whether a person would be willing to obey God if the person knew for sure God had given the person a command. It is not hard to show (and I shall later give some illustrations) that this is a question with plenty of bite, at least for committed religious believers.

However, once we recognize how silentio has framed his story, we can see that we cannot possibly see ourselves as being in the exact situation Abraham is in. Kant is surely right in holding that any sane person today who heard a voice telling him to kill his child would at the very least have reasonable doubts that this voice came from God. However, although we all may agree with Kant's conclusion, it is by no means necessary to reach that conclusion on the basis of Kantian grounds. It is clear that those Kantian grounds would make faith in silentio's sense impossible. If my ethical knowledge is a priori and rationally certain, then this knowledge must surely be more certain than any belief I have about a revelation from God. Faith in silentio's sense requires that I know both what my ethical duty is, and also know what God has commanded me to do. Kantian epistemology does not allow me knowledge of the latter.

However, Kantian epistemology has its own problems. Very few contemporary moral philosophers would agree with Kant that our moral knowledge is rationally certain a priori knowledge. However we acquire our moral knowledge, it is, like most (or all) human knowledge, fallible. Suppose we think, as Hegel did and some contemporary followers of Hegel still do, that our moral knowledge is grounded in the laws and customs of a contemporary people. Moral knowledge is grounded, not in some timeless faculty of reason, but in the "overlapping consensus" that has been

achieved in a particular concrete society. It is by no means clear that what is "ethical" in this sense could not be reasonably challenged on the grounds that it conflicts with what someone believes to be a divine revelation.

A person of faith could in fact agree with Kant that an alleged voice from heaven commanding one to kill a child would not be the voice of God, but do so for completely un-Kantian reasons. The belief that God would not require an act of child sacrifice might be one that is itself an expression of faith. That is, one might believe that God would not make such a command because one believes that God has revealed this about himself. In that case it would be because I believe God's revelation (accepted in faith) that I would reject the possibility that God would ask for such a sacrifice. Anyone who accepts the biblical revelation as God's revealed word, including its commands, would have good reasons for this very belief, since the Bible itself explicitly condemns child sacrifice. The prophet Jeremiah explicitly says that God does not require such sacrifices and in fact that such an idea "has never even entered God's mind."[4] So the belief that God would never require child sacrifice, far from making faith impossible, could itself be an expression of faith.

How Abraham's situation differs from our own: (2) historical differences

Someone might object to this by citing the Abraham story. How, it might be argued, can I claim that it is not possible reasonably to believe God has commanded a follower to sacrifice a child if I believe that God did in fact ask this of Abraham? Surely, what is actual must be possible, and if this has happened, it must be possible for it to happen. And if God has done this on one occasion, how can we know he will not do so again?

One possible reply to this objection is to deny the historicity of the story. Many biblical scholars would today deny that the story in Genesis 22 describes actual historical events. Perhaps, for example, the passage was created by an ancient author precisely in order to help the Hebrew people understand that Yahweh, unlike some of the Canaanite gods, does not require human sacrifice. Imagine a Canaanite reproaching a Hebrew in the following way: "We followers of Baal are more devoted to our God than you Hebrews are to Yahweh, for we offer our children as sacrifices, something you are unwilling to do." The Hebrew might well respond to

[4] See Jeremiah 7:31. Also see Ezekiel 20:25–6. Of course the case against child sacrifice does not depend simply on these two texts, but on the whole biblical ethical teaching.

this challenge as follows: "Well, we would be willing to do this if our God required it, as the story of Abraham and Isaac shows. However, we know that our God does not require this; in fact he forbids the practice." If the story is non-historical and was created to serve this kind of function, then one can simply deny that God ever in fact has commanded human sacrifice.

I believe that the vast majority of biblical scholars would endorse the idea that Genesis 22 is not historical, regardless of whether they agree with my speculative suggestion about the possible function of the passage. However, for the sake of argument, I shall assume that these scholars who reject the historicity of the story are mistaken, and that the events described in Genesis 22 actually occurred. Suppose that God did ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and suppose that Abraham reasonably believed that God made this request. It does not follow that a contemporary person must accept the possibility that a similar belief today could be reasonable. For we can well imagine differences between Abraham's historical situation and our own that explain why God might make such a command to Abraham, and why Abraham could reasonably believe that God had made such a command. Once we understand the differences between Abraham's historical situation and our own, we might reasonably believe that Abraham's situation could not today be reduplicated precisely.

What sort of differences do I have in mind? The biblical Abraham apparently lived in a culture where child sacrifice was far from unusual. If our ethical knowledge is historically grounded, Abraham could hardly have had any confidence that such actions were wrong. Many cultures have practiced and approved of infanticide for all kinds of reasons. Even if Abraham's own culture condemned the practice as unethical, Abraham would surely have known that there were other cultures that believed that God (or gods) did require such things. He thus would have had no way of knowing with certainty that God would not require child sacrifice, even if (as silentio assumes) sacrificing a child would have been contrary to Abraham's ethical duty as understood by his own culture.

Why might God make such a request? There are many possible reasons, and perhaps it is not possible to know God's actual reasons. From the point of view of God, it may also be relevant that God does not in fact intend Abraham to perform the act, but only to show his willingness to do so. (Remember, we are assuming the historicity of the story for the sake of the argument.) However, even if we do not know God's actual reason, we can speculate about possible reasons. One such possibility draws on the same themes that I discussed earlier, when posing the question of the point

of the story on the assumption that the story is non-historical. That is, God might have made such a request of Abraham precisely to teach Abraham (and his descendants) in a memorable way that child sacrifice is *not* something that God requires.

Of course Abraham himself would not know God's reasons for making such a command; nor would it be necessary for him to know this. The point of the story is that Abraham has faith in God. He trusts God and believes God is good and will keep his promises to him, even though he does not understand why God is asking him to do what he is supposed to do. A contemporary person can admire Abraham's faith and approve of Abraham's actions in the sense that the person can affirm that Abraham was right to act as he did. In effect the contemporary can say, "I would hope that if I had been in Abraham's situation I would have acted as Abraham did."

Of course a contemporary person of faith is not in Abraham's situation, and, if I am right, cannot be in that exact situation. Abraham could well have thought that it was at least possible that God might require human sacrifice. A contemporary person of faith who is committed to the God of the Bible may be certain that God does not require this, precisely because such a contemporary believes that God has revealed himself fully in the biblical story as a whole. That story, taken as a whole, including Genesis 22, makes it plain that child sacrifice is forbidden by God. My confidence that God will not require me to sacrifice a child is itself the outgrowth of faith in the goodness of the biblical God and trust that this God is who he reveals himself to be. Hence, even if I believe in the historical truth of Genesis 22, it does not follow that I must believe in the possibility that God would require me to sacrifice a child.

One might say that a contemporary person with biblical faith could replace Kant's claim with the following:

> That it is wrong for me as a person of faith to sacrifice my son is certain, because of what I have learned about God from the Bible. If I hear a voice from heaven (or in my head) telling me to sacrifice my son, then I can know that this voice does not come from the God of the Bible. It is the biblical God in whom I have put my trust.

The continued relevance of the Abraham story

I have now presented a defense of my first thesis: It is possible consistently to hold that Abraham's act was admirable, and yet be confident that a

contemporary who believes he or she has been asked by God to sacrifice a child is deluded. It is now time to turn to my second thesis, which is a claim that the first thesis does not empty the Abraham story of its religious relevance. One might think that the first thesis does exactly this, since my argument rests on the epistemic and historical differences between Abraham and ourselves. In effect the first thesis is an argument that we cannot be in Abraham's situation. Does this not imply that we should, as silentio says, "forget Abraham," since it is not worthwhile to "remember a past that cannot become a present."

By no means. I shall now argue that although the particular details of Abraham's dilemma cannot apply to a contemporary person of faith, the essential features of Abraham's dilemma are still relevant. In the most important respects, Abraham and a contemporary person of faith face the same difficulties, and the contemporary can seek to follow Abraham's example.

What is the main difficulty faced by Abraham? Silentio describes the problem in different ways. Abraham is described as someone who faces a "teleological suspension of the ethical." He is required to be "the single individual" who as the individual is "higher than the universal." Abraham has an "absolute duty to God" and therefore "relates to the universal [the ethical] through the absolute [God]" rather than relating to the absolute through the universal. Finally, Abraham is described as someone who must be silent; he is unable to communicate to others in his society his reasons for acting as he does. All of these descriptions involve a tension between the demands of faith and the demands of what silentio calls "the ethical." The crucial interpretive question is what silentio means by "the ethical."

Many commentators have assumed that the ethical in *Fear and Trembling* is understood in a Kantian way, because the description of the ethical as "the universal" suggests a reference to the Kantian categorical imperative. However, the use of this language is not decisive, as Hegel also describes ethical life as "universal" in character.[5] I suggest that we look at the concrete descriptions of ethical life provided in *Fear and Trembling* to determine what conception of the ethical life is in play.

The paradigm of the ethical life for silentio is the "tragic hero," and he provides three examples of tragic heroes whose lives superficially parallel Abraham's because they are required to sacrifice the child. The first of these figures is Agamemnon, who must sacrifice Iphigenia to placate the goddess Artemis and allow the Greek fleet to sail to Troy. The second is

[5] For example, see Hegel (1977), paragraphs 183 and 426, and (1971), paragraphs 152–57 and 260.

Jephthah from the Old Testament, who must sacrifice his daughter to save Israel's victory because of a vow he has made to God. The final example is the Roman consul Lucius Brutus, who condemned his own sons to death when they participated in a plot to restore the former king.

There is, I would argue, little hope that these three ethical heroes can justify their actions by appealing to the Kantian categorical imperative. The Kantian principle is supposed to provide an objective, timeless standard to determine what is morally right, but one cannot imagine Agamemnon appealing to such a principle. Nor is it possible to imagine any contemporary Kantian who would argue that killing a child so as to advance a military adventure would be morally right, or that morality would require Jephthah to kill his daughter because of a rash (and morally unjustifiable) vow.

Yet silentio describes these three characters as if the ethical character of their actions is obvious. In evaluating Jephthah's act, silentio says that "every freeborn man will understand, every stouthearted woman will admire Jephthah, and every maiden in Israel will wish to act as his daughter did" (FT 50/SKS 4, 151). It is clear that what these three ethical heroes have in common is this: they allowed their obligations as leaders of the state to trump their obligations to their children. There is no appeal to any a priori rational principle, but only to the fact that they saved the nation by their actions. These characters reside in ethical worlds in which their ethical duties are derived from the social institutions in which they participate, and it is taken as obvious that one's duties to the state trump those duties grounded in the family. I submit that the conception of the ethical life operative in *Fear and Trembling* is, broadly speaking, Hegelian rather than Kantian. The ethical consists of those obligations that are grounded in concrete human institutions, such as the family and the state, and justified through the shared language and assumptions of a historical "people."

Abraham's action cannot be understood as ethical, not because his action is not universalizable but because he does not live in a society with a state and thus has no higher ethical duties than those he has to his family:

> For I would certainly like to know how Abraham's act can be brought into relation to the universal, whether any connection can be discovered between what Abraham did and the universal other than that Abraham overstepped it. It is not to save a people, not to uphold the idea of the state, not to appease angry gods that Abraham does it. (FT 52/SKS 4, 152–153)

Abraham's action cannot be understood ethically because "there is no higher expression of the ethical in Abraham's life than this: that the father must love the son" (FT 52/SKS 4, 153).

A look at Problem III confirms this basically Hegelian understanding of the ethical life in the book. Abraham cannot explain what he is doing to anyone; cannot justify his behavior to others in his society. The reason this is so is that a justification must appeal to the accepted values of a society that are embedded in its language, which is the repository of its taken-for-granted justificatory principles. We could use more contemporary language and say that Abraham's problem is that he cannot appeal to "public reason" to justify what he does (as in John Rawls) or appeal to the "overlapping consensus" that provides the basis for a society's ethical life. (Here one might think of Jeffrey Stout's attempt to develop a pragmatic basis for ethics.[6])

Here is a description of an imagined contemporary person who will in important ways find himself/herself in Abraham's situation. Let us call this person James. James is part of a modern society and recognizes certain ethical duties by virtue of participation in that society. However, James is also a person of faith. What does this mean? It means that in some way God has addressed James as an individual. This address must not be understood simply as an ascertaining of some general truth by use of James' natural powers. Rather, God has communicated some message with specific content to James at some particular historical point of time. How this has happened we can leave undetermined. Perhaps God has spoken to James through the Bible or some other sacred text. Or perhaps James has had a mystical experience.

However this has come about, James has somehow come to recognize God's voice, and he has responded in faith. That is, he believes that God is good and trusts that God's message to him is true. How James has come to know this, we can leave to the epistemologists, but if we wish him to be like Abraham, we must assume that he has indeed come to know that God has spoken to him. If God has made promises to him, God can be trusted to keep those promises. If God has given him a command, then James can be sure that the command is one that can and should be followed. To put James in Abraham's situation, all we have to add to the above is that God has indeed commanded James to do something that conflicts with James' ethical duty.

James will now be faced with the same conflict that Abraham faced: What is highest in his life? If the ethical is the highest, then James will subordinate his duty as a person of faith to his ethical duty. That is, he will

[6] See Stout (2004). Stout in turn relies partly on the work of Robert Brandom, who gives a kind of pragmatic reading of Hegelian ideas.

regard what he has learned from his society as right as trumping what he has come to believe is right for him as a result of the revelation he has received from God. If, however, James regards faithfulness to God as higher than the ethical, then he must violate his society's standard of ethics for the sake of obedience to God. If he does this, he realizes that to others in his society he will appear to be a wrong-doer. He will not be able to justify his actions by appealing to "public reasons." He cannot explain his actions by appealing to the principles that his society accepts as ethical, because language and reason are social phenomena, and his action is based on his faith in God and in the revelation he has received from God, not on generally accepted social values. (Remember that the revelation James has received is not "general revelation" accessible to humans generally, but a special message received at a particular time.)

Is such a conflict possible? I shall describe three possible cases. The first case is clearly not actual, but it certainly seems possible. Imagine the outcome of World War II had been different. The German Nazis successfully developed the atomic bomb before the United States did, and by unleashing its terrible power became the masters of Europe. Racist views are now deeply engrained in the fabric of European society, and have been so for several generations. The educational system and its intellectual leaders ruthlessly stamp out examples of what our society would call liberal thinking. (It is easier for me than it might be for others to imagine this, since I was brought up in the American South prior to the civil rights era, and in my childhood I was taught that racial integration was a moral evil that a good person should resist.) In this imagined European society, it is regarded as an ethical duty for any right-thinking citizen to turn in any Jewish person who has so far been able to hide and escape extermination.

James has been brought up in this society and taught its values. Perhaps when he sees a young Jewish person being hauled away to the camps, he feels compassion and has an impulse to help. However, James has been taught that this is morally wrong; the urge to be compassionate is a temptation that a good person must resist.

Now imagine that James, who is living in this society and has acquired its ethical perspective, receives a message from God that racism is wrong. How he receives this message is not important. Perhaps he hears a voice, or experiences something like a Socratic "daimon," who warns him that he is doing wrong when he mistreats a person who is a minority. Perhaps he has found an uncensored copy of the New Testament, and has read the parable of the Good Samaritan. As he reads he becomes convinced that Jews and other minorities are his neighbors, and that God has commanded him to

love his neighbor as himself. If he is faithful to God's message to him, he can expect to find himself in conflict with his society. He will find it impossible to explain or justify his actions in trying to love all people in such a society. From *our* perspective, of course, James is doing what is ethical if he follows God's command, but that is not how things will look to James in *his* society.

Why is it important to allow for the possibility that James might be justified in acting as the "single individual" in his society? One reason it is important is that if we rule out the possibility of such a case, we are in effect deifying the established ethical values of society. No fundamental challenge to those values can be allowed unless we hold open the possibility that an individual might justifiably appeal to something higher than generally accepted social teachings. We might complacently say, "But we don't live in a racist society such as your imagined one in which James lives. We live in an ethical society; one with the right values." However, we ought to recognize that the leaders of James' society might well say the same thing. Do we dare to claim that our society has no moral blind spots? Do we really think that societies of the future will not look back on our time and marvel that we tolerated certain evils and even regarded them as goods, just as we now look back with moral horror at societies which accepted slavery?

Suppose we imagine James as living, not in my imagined Nazi society, but in an actual contemporary Western society? Is it possible for him to experience a conflict between the ethical and the demands of faith? Certainly it must be possible, unless we are convinced that our contemporary ethical standards are somehow perfect and should never be challenged. It is difficult to describe such a case, however, since by definition James will have to act in a way that most of us currently will find immoral, and thus it will not be easy to sympathize with him. Nevertheless, if we use our imaginations, perhaps we can describe some possible cases, though it will always be easier to recognize such a case in hindsight, after our ethical views have changed.

I will describe two cases, still imaginative thought-experiments, but somewhat closer to the actual world. One case will be more appealing to those with progressive commitments, and one will be more appealing for those with traditional ethical views. For the first case let us place James in the actual American society of the 1950s. In this era homosexuality was almost universally regarded as a moral evil, and for the most part homosexual conduct was proscribed by the law. Imagine that in this society James hears a message from God that homosexual people ought to be

allowed to marry, just as heterosexuals do, and begins to support such a change in society. (Again, it does not matter whether this message comes through the hearing of Scripture or in some other way.) Of course the United States (and most of the Western world) has changed dramatically on this issue in the last sixty years, but it is highly plausible that if James had supported gay and lesbian marriage in 1955, he would have been regarded as a bad person, someone who was undermining the moral character of society. (Indeed there are still lots of people who would regard James in this way.) If James as "the single individual" acts on his faith convictions, he will certainly be unable to appeal to accepted moral values and principles.

For my last example, consider the controversial example of abortion. My sense is that the majority view in Europe, and probably the majority view in America, is that abortion is morally permissible and is even a fundamental moral right. Imagine that this liberal view is so dominant that critiques of abortion cannot even gain a hearing. Again, in this situation, imagine that James has received a message from God that he ought to do what he can to stop abortions from occurring. Those people who believe that abortion is morally permissible will regard James as seriously wrong if he works hard to prevent abortions. And perhaps they are right in their judgment about James. Those who believe abortion is morally permissible or even good will have difficulty imagining James could be right and thinking about this case sympathetically. The "single individual" will always be judged wrong by the majority in his or her society. But it is at least conceivable that James is right, and that a century from now society will look back at our practice of widespread abortion and celebrate a figure such as James as someone who courageously opposed what was thought to be "ethical" in the name of faith, even though James could not explain or justify his actions at the time by appealing to public reason. In all three of my cases, James embodies what is true of Abraham; he allows what he believes by faith to trump what he believes because of the education and nurture he has received in a particular society.

Does this make faith too easy?

Silentio of course stresses the difficulty of faith. In arguing against the possibility that a person of faith might be called to approve of child sacrifice, it might be thought I am making faith too easy, and thus undermining the purpose of *Fear and Trembling*. I do not think this is the case. Standing up as an individual against the dominant values of

a society is never easy. On the contrary, I would argue that identifying this possibility with a deranged act of child murder is a way of taking the possibility off the table, and excusing us from the possibility that we might be called to be "single individuals."

Many people may respond that faith in the sense I have described it is not a real possibility for them, because they have never received such a message from God and cannot imagine doing so. However, anyone who identifies with a faith community should realize that God can speak in many different ways. Not every message from God requires a voice from heaven. Muslims may believe that God speaks though the pages of the *Qur'an*. Jews may believe that God speaks through the Hebrew Bible. Christians may well believe that God speaks to them in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and through the pages of the Bible. It is well to remember that such messages are particular; they come to us in history at specific times. And the messages they bring may well conflict with the dominant ethical perspectives of our societies. The word one receives from God through such a revelation may well be one that society judges "preposterous" and "absurd." Kierkegaard himself certainly thought that the Christian revelation, centering on God's incarnation in Christ, was of this character. Every Christian believer is on this view analogous to Abraham, someone who believes God's Word even when it makes no sense when judged by dominant human ways of reasoning.

Of course I have throughout this discussion assumed that it is possible for an individual to recognize a special revelation from God as authentic. Many readers will doubt this possibility, and I grant that there are large epistemological issues that this raises. The question as to how a genuine revelation from God could be recognized as genuine is a difficult one that Kierkegaard himself struggled to answer in his unpublished *Book on Adler*. However, to say that the question is difficult is not to say that it cannot be answered. Some of the criteria Kierkegaard proposes in the *Book on Adler* have merit, and there are other criteria that might be added. But these epistemological issues are the subject of another book.[7]

I do not think silentio would be unsympathetic to my argument. At one point he actually voices a worry that discussing the Abraham story might lead someone to emulate Abraham in killing a child: "Can one then speak candidly about Abraham without running the risk that an individual in mental confusion might go and do likewise?" (FT 25/SKS 4, 126). Silentio

[7] I have attempted briefly to address these issues in Evans (2006), pp. 239–60. A fuller answer is provided in Evans (1996).

decides that he can run this risk, and that it is worth running, for otherwise faith would cease to exist "precisely because it has always existed" (FT 47/ SKS 4, 149). But I think he is serious when he implies that a person who wanted to do exactly what Abraham did would be "mentally confused," really mentally ill. We must not allow the dramatic character of Abraham's action to obscure the ways in which we can be called to emulate Abraham.

CHAPTER 5

Eschatological faith and repetition: Kierkegaard's Abraham and Job

John Davenport

Introduction: the eschatological

For many decades now, students and teachers reading Kierkegaard have been troubled by the apparent irrationality of faith as depicted in his famous rendition of the Abraham and Isaac story, the *Akedah*: could a religious commitment that is central to my identity or to the meaning that life has for me really be exemplified by submitting to a horrifically immoral command to kill an innocent child, abandoning my own conscience to follow an allegedly divine voice, or blindly giving up control of my own actions to an inscrutable directing force allegedly higher than cultures and human reason? Unsurprisingly, many contemporary readers have found that not to be any form of worship worthy of the God who is Love (as Kierkegaard frequently wrote of the biblical God).

Ancient readers of the *Akedah* narrative in *Genesis* may not have been troubled in the same way. As Ronald Green has put it to me, Abraham "intending the death of his son" on Mount Moriah did not bother most "classical Jewish thinkers, because they never conceived of this act as murder. For them, Isaac was an appendage of the father, and Abraham's act was one of supreme self-sacrifice."[1] In other words, in an archaic view according to which Isaac is Abraham's most prized possession, his willingness to offer Isaac back to the same God who gave Isaac by miracle to his aged wife Sarah is proof of Abraham's absolute devotion. However foreign this view of children is to us now, it helps remind us that the problems and lessons which Kierkegaard intends us to see in the story of Abraham and Isaac may not be close to those on which ancient Hebrew readers or medieval Jewish scholars focused. Our topic is *Kierkegaard's* sense of the

[1] Ronald Green, personal communication (July 2009 email); he explains this point in detail in his helpful discussion in Green (1988), ch. 4. For example, Green says here that biblical and rabbinic writers traditionally "conceive a young child as a possession of the parent, and morally as a physical-emotional part of the parent's person" (pp. 90–91).

story, not the original *Akedah* itself, however far the implications drawn by his pseudonym Johannes *de silentio* may be from the true intent of the book of *Genesis*.[2] And for him, the idea that Abraham might be guilty of attempted or intended (even if forestalled) murder is crucial. For as I will argue, his account aims to show that Abraham is not really a murderer from the perspective of faith, and counts as a murderer if and only if faith is cancelled.[3]

And this topic is hard enough by itself. Did Kierkegaard primarily mean, as Patrick Gardiner says, that "an individual may believe himself subject to the demands of a unique calling which cannot be accommodated within the framework of socially determined duties"?[4] But why should such an exceptional status have to depend on a direct relation to a personal, covenantal God? More plausibly, Gardiner suggests that the point of the second *Problema* is that ethical norms comprehensible by "finite reason" retain a "relative validity" though "the obligation to conform to them finally rests upon a prior commitment to God," conceived as an "infinite or absolute 'other' that transcends human reason and understanding."[5] No doubt as a Lutheran Christian, Kierkegaard did hold such a view of ethical requirement. But it cannot be the *main* point of his (pseudonymous) analysis of the *Akedah* for the simple reasons that (a) it reduces the relation of faith and ethics to a relation between a higher and lower kind of moral obligation, and (b) it does not make clear how the ethical proscription on murder and the equally pressing obligation to preserve one's own children from mortal harm (when one can by legitimate means) are *retained, affirmed, and upheld*, even in some relativized or decentered form, in religious faith as obedience to a transcendent God. Yet in this work and other pseudonymous writings, Kierkegaard repeatedly makes clear that the existential stage or "sphere" of religiousness *includes* prior ethical norms and aesthetic values in combination with (or reorientation toward) the ultimate

[2] I refer here to "Kierkegaard" although this work is attributed to his pseudonym Johannes *de Silentio* because (1) Johannes' perspective as a person of infinite resignation seems adequate to perceive the mystery of faith even though he lacks Abraham's kind of faith himself; and (2) I have shown elsewhere the close agreement between Silentio's account of Abraham's faith and the account of religiousness A and B in the *Postscript* by the pseudonym Johannes Climacus whose authority is more widely recognized; and (3) there are plenty of remarks by Kierkegaard in his own name that suggest agreement with at least the core of Silentio's conception. As Alastair Hannay says, Kierkegaard's "aesthetic" works are not merely literary exercises because their main themes are "very obviously the author's main concern throughout": see Hannay's introduction to Kierkegaard (1985), p. 8. On point (1), see Kemp (2013), pp. 49–70.

[3] Until the last fine copy, Kierkegaard's drafts included the remark that if faith "is removed, then Abraham is a murderer" (FT Supplement, 250/PAP IV B 88: 2).

[4] Gardiner (2002), p. 67.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

religious element, whatever that amounts to. This is what I have called the "cumulative" relation among Kierkegaard's existential categories. It means that ethical willing to the point of infinite resignation must remain within the higher stance of faith: this is essential for any adequate interpretation.

In contrast to Gardiner's and many similar views, I believe the main point that Kierkegaard hoped to convey through Silentio has been largely missed – despite much progress made on vital secondary points by twentieth-century scholarship, and though the elusiveness of his main point is Kierkegaard's own fault for selecting so complex a case (perhaps because it lent itself to rhetorical contrasts with Hegel, as we see especially in *Problema* I). The main point, as Hannay explains, depends on the idea that Abraham's

> special greatness was that, in doing what he did [starting to sacrifice Isaac], he did not doubt that he would get Isaac back. Abraham believed that he would, if not keep Isaac, at least have him restored, whatever he did, even to the point of killing him ... Johannes de silentio's speech in praise of Abraham [establishes] his greatness on three counts: in respect of what he loved (God), of what he confidently expected (the impossible), and of what he strove with (not the world, or himself, but again God).[6]

In short, Abraham's love of God and obedience to God (which are ultimately equivalent) are vital aspects of his *faith* in God, but the intentional object of that faith is Isaac's surviving to fulfill God's initial promise to Abraham and Sarah: the core of faith is trust in divine fulfillment of an ethically ideal outcome that seems absurd or "impossible" (as Hannay puts it) to human reason, because it is beyond the human actor's power to secure (by his or her agency) given the circumstances; but it remains possible in a different sense through a miracle from God.

This is the thesis of the "eschatological" reading, as I call it in three published essays[7] building on work by Edward Mooney, C. Steven Evans, John Lippitt, Hannay and Green to solve puzzles about the "teleological suspension of the ethical," the relation of faith to infinite resignation, and other key features of *Fear and Trembling*. In opposition to "higher ethics" readings of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous portrait of "faith" as obedience to divine commands or obligations to others transcending rational explanation or expression in universal norms, the eschatological account of faith in both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Postscript* says that faith consists

[6] Hannay's introduction to Kierkegaard (1985), p. 14, referring to the three aspects of greatness at FT 16/SKS 4, 133.

[7] The first and primary essay of the trilogy is Davenport (2008a), pp. 196–233.

primarily in trust that the highest ethical ideals will be fulfilled by God as God promises us, despite their inaccessibility to our agency. In Abraham's case, this means trusting that Isaac will somehow live to fulfill God's promise of fathering a holy nation, *even if* he is sacrificed on Mount Moriah (FT 36/SKS 4, 32–33). The return of Isaac is more than a single isolated event; it is structurally similar to the comprehensive fulfillment of God's plan at the end of created time, in which it participates. Others, most notably Sharon Krishek, have arrived independently at similar conclusions. Following Robert Adams' point that the knight of faith depends on God directly for something while the knight of infinite resignation does not, she writes:

> In other words, faith is trusting God that what is impossible for me ("outside the control of [my] will") will be possible nevertheless. This trust amounts to an acknowledgement of my deep dependency on God for achieving a hold on anything beyond my control. Being a knight of faith ... means to have the trust that what I accept in resignation as completely lost to me ... will nevertheless be returned to me. I cannot tell how this is to happen ... but trusting God means that I believe in the ultimate realization of the good.[8]

We may also think of this miraculous fulfillment of the ethical ideal as one element in a *narrative* structure, so that "faith" in Kierkegaard's distinctive existential sense is essentially nested in a certain kind of trajectory or narratival development involving all these elements:

1. *An ethical ideal* E that is *not* rejected or transcended as a moral imperative: the agent must continue to recognize and to will this ideal. [Abraham must love Isaac with his whole soul.]
2. *An obstacle* O to the ethical ideal arises: the human agent is prevented from achieving or securing his moral ideal by some misfortune, problem, or set of circumstances that make it practically impossible for the agent to secure it by his/her own powers. [In Abraham's case, the obstacle is precisely God's mysterious and terrible command to give Isaac back to Him.]
3. *Infinite resignation* (∞R): having concentrated his/her entire identity in commitment to E, the agent then accepts that E is humanly unattainable because of O: E is accessible to his/her agency only as an ideal in *atemporal eternity*. So the agent either stops actively pursuing E by his/her own endeavors, or pursues E out of pure principle without any

[8] Krishek (2009), pp. 98–99.

hope of thereby realizing E. [Abraham is resigned in this way (mainly in the first mode); he accepts that *he* cannot save Isaac if God demands him.]

4. A *divine promise* (from God or His prophets) that E will be actualized by divine power within the created order of existence – either *within time*, or in *the hereafter* as a new temporal series (rather than as a Platonic *aeternitas*). [In Abraham's case, God has promised to him that Isaac will become the father of a holy nation to bring the Word to all peoples.]
5. *The absurd*: the content of the divine promise, which (given O) is now only possible for God by miracle, and thus appears unintelligible outside of faith. [For Abraham, the absurd is Isaac surviving to fulfill his promised role, *despite* being sacrificed as God demands.]
6. *Authority*: while the agent recognizes the authority of the ethical ideal in itself, or as rationally correct, or as required on the basis of social practice and tradition, he or she is also commanded to believe the promise revealed by God qua person, rather than qua universal principle; so the authority of this commanded trust in the promise transcends that of the ethical ideal.[9]

The ethical ideal is a central *theme* in the knight of faith's story, into which the divine promise enters. In Abraham's case, it is the ideal of love. The obstacle may be part of the setting or background history (as with the Fall), or a new development after the agent's ethical striving and hope have begun (as in Abraham's case). *Existential Faith* is then the process in which the agent responds to these factors by infinitely resigning E, yet also by trusting entirely in the eschatological promise, and thereby staking her/his identity on the conviction that E will be actualized by God, as God promised: "Even in the moment when the knife gleamed," Abraham trusted that Isaac would not be permanently dead, that he would get Isaac back "by virtue of the absurd" (FT 36/SKS 4, 131) – the phrase referring to eschatological possibilities that depend on miraculous divine power.

This structure allows us to see the similarity of Abraham's situation to the Christian's when facing division from God by sin (an inward obstacle)

[9] I have added element (6) to prior versions of this schematic summary both to satisfy some criticisms and to clarify that the divine promise that E will be fulfilled by God is not something we can just take or leave as we like: we *must* respond to it, either in faith or offense. Thus this element (6) also clarifies that infinite resignation by itself alone is an inadequate response: it is an unstable position. However, condition (6) is not separate from the others: Kierkegaard's direct religious writings confirm that God's authority is one with his fulfilling his promises (CD 23/SKS 10, 29–30).

that he cannot overcome by his own efforts which prevents him from realizing his highest good, as Johannes Climacus calls "eternal happiness" in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: only by faith in the miracle of the incarnate God's atonement for sin can his highest good be fulfilled. The parallel is clear, as Ronald Green especially has stressed in his work on *Fear and Trembling*.[10] Kierkegaard makes this point in a pseudonymous comment on his own book: he has the authoritative pseudonym Johannes Climacus say that "In *Fear and Trembling*, sin was used occasionally in order to throw light on Abraham's ethical suspension," though Abraham himself was not described as a sinner (CUP 268/SKS 7, 200–01). And this leads immediately into Climacus' discussion of how sin is described in the *Concept of Anxiety* (CUP 269/SKS 7, 201–02). Similarly, in *Sickness Unto Death*, the highest pseudonym Anti-Climacus (who Kierkegaard considers more authoritative than himself on Christian faith) tells us that to achieve "authentic hope," we must believe "that with God everything is possible" (SUD 38/SKS 11, 34). This counts most when "a person is brought to his extremity, when humanly speaking, there is no possibility" (*ibid.*) – that is, when we have to make the movement of infinite resignation. The "believer" in the authentic sense of faith does not collapse even though his "downfall" is assured, humanly speaking, or according to what is possible through planning and effort for human agency. Despite being in this sense helpless, he does not despair because he believes that God will help him. And "unexpectedly, miraculously, divinely, help does come" (SUD 39/SKS 11, 35). Faithful belief places absolute trust in God, yet is surprised because the manner in which the good is fulfilled by God is always beyond human rational prediction or calculation.

Familiar eschatological stories in theistic religions from Zoroastrianism on have the same six-part structure: they promise a miraculous renewal in which ethical ideals will be fulfilled and sufferings of this life find ultimate consolation. When we recognize this general structure of eschatological goods, we can see that Kierkegaardian faith is also a type of eschatological hope, based on the gift of a revealed promise, to which the faithful agent responds in willed conviction; faith is an absolute resolve, total commitment (CD 85–87/SKS 10, 96–99). Now eschatology in its specific doctrinal sense refers to the *final and complete* realization of the Good by divine power in a hereafter that succeeds this created order of time, with effects extending to all mortal persons and the whole of creation. But its basic form for the single individual – and especially its distinctness from striving

[10] See Green (1992).

and resignation in relation to the ethical ideal – is disclosed in the intentional object of Abraham's trust. As Climacus tells us again, in both *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, the teleological suspension is an "ordeal" or period of being "on trial" in which the only way to achieve "repetition" or get back to ethical fulfillment is in a "new immediacy" believed "by virtue of the absurd" (CUP 263/SKS 7, 196–97). By itself, obedience to divine command has neither of these features: it may not be absurd or humanly impossible; and as the fulfillment of a duty, it is not necessarily linked with the physical-temporal concreteness of the "immediate" (for duty refers directly to our intentions and internal attitudes with no certainty of changing the external world at all). As Silentio explains in Problema III, in contrast with the "esthetic," "Faith is not the first immediacy but a later immediacy (FT 82/SKS 4, 172). This means that its object is a good realized in some concrete way, not an abstract ideal. Salvation in an earthly hereafter has both features: it is the maximal realization of the ethical ideal in the aesthetic domain. Sin is also "a later immediacy" (FT 98/SKS 4, 188) beyond our mere existence in time; the *Postscript* describes sin as being heterogeneous with the ethical (CUP 267/SKS 7, 199–200). And for Christians, if this breach is not overcome by the miracle of divine forgiveness, it ends in damnation – the absolute or irreversible heterogeneity (CUP 586/SKS 7, 451; compare CUP 369/SKS 7, 281 on "eternal unhappiness"). Thus for human persons as free and responsible beings, there are two possible end-points in the trajectory of "second immediacy," which makes it more recognizable as eschatological immediacy.

In what follows, I will further defend this interpretation by showing how it also makes sense of the close relation between *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, and respond to some recent criticisms. I hope to hone and nuance the eschatological reading in ways that acknowledge what is persuasive in these critiques, while also clarifying it to avoid misunderstandings.

Eschatological significant in miraculous turning-points: a narrative analysis

In a provocative new book on *Fear and Trembling*, Merold Westphal raises a series of objections to the eschatological reading, starting with the worry that the term "eschatological hope" is stretched too far when it is abstracted from "the culmination of history" and "final judgment" to be applied to Abraham's belief that he will be blessed "in this life" by Isaac's

living to father children.[11] Of course Westphal is correct that *Fear and Trembling* says nothing about the Apocalypse, which is final and *comprehensive*. Westphal and I also agree that it is vital not to "Christianize" Abraham's (almost) sacrificing Isaac as merely an anagogic anticipation of God sacrificing Jesus Christ. My use of "eschatology" in a *broad* sense to refer to ultimate fulfillment of the good by divine power indicates the more general structure common to both Abraham's faith (as Silentio portrays it) and religiousness "A" and "B" in later works such as the *Postscript*.

But this sense is a term of art referring to an essential feature of many post-axial religions; I could have used a term like "quasi-eschatological" instead if it were not so awkward. Calling Abraham's faith "eschatological" in this broad sense does not depend on taking Isaac to symbolize Christ, or taking Isaac's return to symbolize the Resurrection. Rather, it concerns the kind of narrative structure that the *Akedah* (in Silentio's rendition) shares with *strictly* eschatological narratives that do explicitly concern apocalyptic transformations of the whole cosmos. My claim is that Kierkegaard, like J. R. R. Tolkien and a few others in romance tradition(s), understood that what really gives such narratives their religious potency is a certain kind of momentous "turning" or gestalt-change, by which a special kind of "happy ending" gives us a fleeting sense of what the eschaton *sensu strictissimo* might be like for a human person. Thus Tolkien's account of a "eucatastrophe" as a sudden miraculous turn away from a tragic ending to which a human agent's greatest ethically inspired effort seems bound to lead (as he accepts in resignation): The *turning moment* of such narratives has a quality that "denies (in the face of much evidence if you will) universal final defeat," and thus provides a "fleeting glimpse" of the absolute "Joy," a foretaste of salvation.[12] Restated positively, such narrative structures affirm the possibility of universal final victory, or what Tolkien called "the Great Eucatastrophe" in our (non-fictional) reality.[13] If Isaac's sacrifice and

[11] Westphal (2014), ch. 2, p. 38. See also Mulder, p. 63. Sharon Krishek also finds my sense of eschatology in need of clarification because the divine promise and fulfillment can take multiple forms in different narratives (see Krishek 2009, pp. 105–06).

[12] Tolkien (1982), p. 153. Compare Edward Mooney's formula of "Final faith as final assurance despite cause for despair" in Mooney (2013), p. 45. It is no accident that Tolkien also argues that ethical heroism rising to its tragic peak must precede and be retained in the experience of eucatastrophic grace.

[13] Tolkien (1982), p. 155. Tolkien asks us to imagine the incredible joy we would feel if one of the most beautiful fairy tales turned out to be literally true, or "its narrative to be history" – that is, part of "primary" reality, as opposed to the "secondary" world of human fantastic art. This is the same joy that genuinely religious narratives deliver even more profoundly. The joy of a fairy tale eucatastrophe participates in this religious joy, in Tolkien's view, because it points to something that is (or will be) true in primary reality – that is, the real eschaton.

restoration *symbolize* something else, then, it would be not Christ's sacrifice and return specifically, but rather the combination of human effort, humble acceptance of finitude, and eschatological grace in general. But it is more accurate to speak of a relation of *participation* in Plato's sense. The specific goods in which we have faith, according to Kierkegaard's analysis (e.g. Isaac's living to father a great nation, in Abraham's case) are appropriate objects of faith because they are *part* of the ultimate embracing good; they participate in the total consolation of the maximally embracing miraculous good that is strictly eschatological. This defense of the eschatological interpretation can be strengthened by four connected points.

(1) As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, the essential quality that makes a turning or ending eschatological in significance does not depend on *literally* apocalyptic tropes, such as titanic battles, cosmos-shattering tumult, angels descending from clouds, or images of fiery vengeance and blissful reward. Much of this imagery so popular in medieval times suggests that apocalyptic events should be objects of our greatest fear, shock, and awe.[14] In fact, authentic subjective experience of an eschatological good requires a very different kind of feeling that is not easily put into words – a kind of humility combined with infinite joy and assurance that can only come from a reprieve beyond all rational hope in which we feel the direct touch of Divine power, or (if there is such a state as damnation) a horror beyond imagination that we had that possibility of loving redemption and rejected it in self-devouring hatred.[15] It is for this reason that a rare kind of narrative pattern can give us a foretaste of that eschatological experience, as Tolkien tried to say in his account of "eucatastrophe."

For example, consider the story in the film *Flatliners*, where the characters in a near-death state have to face people they have wronged in the past, or who have wronged them; they can escape the growing horror only if they find reconciliation. The hero (Kiefer Sutherland) is the most anxious, because the victim he wronged is a boy who he (with other bullies) accidentally killed when their rock-throwing knocked him out of a tree. After the spirit of this boy attacks the hero again and again, he knows that

[14] See Davenport (1996) and Davenport (2002). These articles explain why eschatological visions of salvation in revealed religions develop only after, and in relation to, moral ideals that are distinct from the divine or sacred in its original form as cosmogonic principle, pure creative power, or the foundation of reality.

[15] Anti-Climacus refers to this horror in the Introduction to *Sickness Unto Death* (SUD 8/SKS 11, 2–3), and describes it further in the next section as being nailed forever to a (disintegrated) self that tries to consume itself but cannot (SUD 21/SKS 11, 15–16). I would compare this to Dostoevsky's "Father Zosimma" describing damnation in *The Brothers Karamazov* as the eternal state of knowing that one had the chance to love and chose not to.

he must go back into the spirit-world to face his doom. Finally he is, in Kierkegaard's sense, infinitely resigned to die; there is no other way to reconcile. He bids his friends goodbye, and goes back into the near-death dream, which now plays out to its conclusion: *he* has to climb the tree in growing desperation; *he* is hit again and again with rocks thrown by the spirit of his former victim; and he falls to his death. But he does not die; as he looks up from the grass, the spirit of the boy who has haunted him draws back his hood, looks at him for a long moment, and smiles as the light spreads over them both. The effect (on a willing viewer, and on the hero) is almost beyond description; it goes far beyond a sense of gratitude for an act of mercy, or joy in a "reprieve." The narrative pattern gives us some inkling of the unique emotion (a state beyond ordinary gratitude) that recognizes this kind of miracle.[16]

Now such a conclusion may *seem* far from any eschatological teaching about final judgment, but in fact it comes near to capturing their essence (as well as human art may). Without a doubt, *it is divine judgment* for this particular character, and through his harrowing experience we get a foretaste of what final judgment may be for us, too. Kierkegaard says (in his own name) in late writings that no one experiences the *eschaton in general* as a cumulative culmination of all history; each experiences it as a verdict on themselves alone. Writing on resurrection, he says, "Immortality is the eternal separation of the righteous from the unrighteous" (CD 205/SKS 10, 52), and "Immortality is judgment, and this pertains to **me**; in **my** view it pertains to **me** most of all; just as in **your** view it pertains to **you** most of all" (CD 209/SKS 10, 57, Kierkegaard's bold, but italics omitted). This concern, whose object is identical with Climacus' "highest good" in the *Postscript*, puts us in a singularizing relation to God: in infinite concern for immortality, "the single individual relates himself to him [God]" (CD 213/SKS 10, 61). It should be our deepest concern in our "innermost being" because salvation is never certain: "The true essential expression of its being by grace is the very fear and trembling of unsureness. There lies faith—as far, just as far, from despair as from sureness" (CD 211/SKS 10, 59). As in Silentio's text, to which this passage alludes, for Kierkegaard, faith consists primarily in trust without rational proof that

[16] Of course there are many such stories, though few effectively convey the requisite experience. Sharon Krishek cites the film *All About My Mother*, which captures the relevant sense of "receiving back" (Krishek 2009, pp. 99–100). I have cited the old Welsh story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – see Davenport (2003), pp. 211–12. The end of Stephen Donaldson's *White Gold Wielder* would be a rare example in which the victory beyond all rational hope feels both personal and cosmic at once.

God offers a miraculous possibility of salvation. Thus Kierkegaard associates faith with the metaphor of turning:

> In the dreadful moment of decisiveness, when humanly speaking no turn is any longer possible, when there is everywhere only wretchedness wherever you turn and however you turn—there is still one more turn possible; it will miraculously turn everything into the good for you: when you love God. (CD 195–96/SKS 10, 42)

By itself, resignation can become despair; but faith adds to resignation a return to new hope. To be sure, such faith involves patient obedience, because the miracle may not come in the way we imagine or wish. But this is obedience in a sense that can be understood only *through* the other elements in the structure of faith: as Kierkegaard says, a willingness to obey God's commands involves trust that God affirms (even commands) interhuman love (CD 243/SKS 10, 92–93). Thus the "absolute duty to God" discussed in *Problema* II is the duty to *have faith* in the sense of absolute trust in God's eschatological promises. In a key footnote, Silentio tells us that the "absolute duty" demanded of the knight of faith is that he *not give up* his hope for the good that he resigns, while one who is only a tragic hero gives it up for a higher duty (a duty that remains universal and so distinct from the "absolute duty") (FT 78 note */SKS 4, 169).[17] In other words, the distinctively religious duty concerns trusting expectation of a miraculous good that vindicates ethical striving.

(2) Other points confirm this key one about narratives with eschatological 'turnings.' The *Two Upbuilding Discourses* published just five months before *Fear and Trembling* use the phrase "Expectancy of Faith" to denote a distinct kind of trust that extends through the whole of time to the moment when we "at last obtain eternal salvation" (EUD 28/SKS 5, 31). These discourses each refer to "judgment day" when we cannot repay our debts (EUD 16/SKS 5, 18–19) and God's promise that "Yet a little while and I shall renew the countenance of the earth" (EUD 38/SKS 5, 42). Likewise, the three *Upbuilding Discourses* published on the same day as *Fear and Trembling* refer to love "hiding" or "covering" sins on "the day of judgment" (EUD 58/SKS 5, 10–11), and to the apostle's zeal because "the end of all things is near" (EUD 69/SKS 5, 24–25). Kierkegaard explains that this remains true even though the Apocalypse did not come (as some

[17] So the eschatological interpretation clearly implies a close relationship between existential faith and hope (and given their relation to agapic love as well, Kierkegaard interconnects all three theological virtues). On religious hope, see John Lippitt's essay in this volume; McDonald (2014); Bernier (2015), ch. 3; and Tebbutt (2014).

expected) within their lifetime, because "every person must die and thereupon come to judgment," when only that person's love will remain with her (EUD 71, compare 77/SKS 5, 33–34).[18] The first discourse in this set even refers to the love that Abraham exemplified in trying to cover the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah (EUD 66/SKS 5, 21–22), and the third refers to the hope that was fulfilled for Abraham as a hope that the "the world cannot take away" (EUD 95/SKS 5, 54) because of inner strength arising from his love of God. The implication throughout is that Abraham's faith points the way for our faith in promised goods that are eschatological in the more familiar sense.

(3) Abraham's getting "a son a second time" (FT 9/SKS 4, 105) is associated with pregnant "moments" of fulfillment that have more explicitly eschatological significance in Kierkegaard's work. Before Isaac is born, we are told that "By faith Abraham received the promise that in his seed all the generations of the earth would be blessed," and he continues to have faith in this even when it seems impossible for Sarah to conceive a son (FT 17/SKS 4, 114). Notice that this initial faith violates no ethical norms and responds to no divine command other than the requirement to believe God's revealed promise; for in this case, the "obstacle" is the biological law applying to Sarah's age rather than any order from God. And the good that God promises actually extends beyond the event on Mount Moriah to a blessing to all coming generations; so Abraham's faith in it continues to his death. For the miracle on the mountain points beyond Abraham's and Isaac's life to a more inclusive fulfillment by which the Word of God is brought to all people and thus salvation made possible. If traced to its conclusion, this good in time converges with the promised new temporal order following salvation – a hereafter in which the "here" of temporal embodied life *continues* in a new form, rather than in a disembodied, Platonic, atemporal heaven. As I have argued in linking *Fear and Trembling* to the *Fragments* and *Postscript*, to appreciate the full significance of Silentio's emphasis on Abraham's hope being for a fulfillment *in time*, we must compare it to Climacus' argument against the "humorist" who retreats into "recollection's eternity behind" (the atemporal eternity of abstract ideas and ethical ideals): the Christian paradox directs one away from the "eternity behind, as if he would receive an eternal happiness *at a definite moment in time*" (CUP 271, note */SKS 7, 202; my italics).[19] The

[18] Like Dickens at the end of *Tale of Two Cities*, Kierkegaard believes that the dying spirit passes straight to judgment and resurrection.

[19] See Davenport (2008b).

two objects of faith look different at first glance, but they have the same form to Kierkegaard, because Isaac's salvation is more than a moment of beatific fulfillment for Abraham alone; in it, we can all experience an anticipation of the ultimate glory of heaven on earth, the Kingdom of God in a Coming Age.

But Silentio emphasizes that Abraham "did not have faith that he would be blessed in a future life but that he would be blessed here in the world" (FT 36/SKS 4, 132). Readers are naturally misled by this passage into thinking that the blessed good Abraham receives has nothing to do with eschatological goods "beyond this life." Yet in fact Silentio only means to contrast Abraham with the knight of infinite resignation who "can be blessed . . . but not within time" (FT 32/SKS 4, 127, compare FT 35/SKS 4, 130). So here Silentio oversimplifies, speaking as if any "future life" were like the atemporal ideal in which the knight of resignation is united with his princess in imagination, to contrast with the *concreteness* of Abraham's miraculous good: "Temporality, finitude – that is what it is all about" (FT 49/SKS 4, 143). Later pseudonyms like Climacus distinguish more carefully between the *hereafter* of Christianity and an atemporal Platonic ideal; for the former also involves an embodied-temporal good like the blessedness that Abraham trusts in. Thus the phrase "in this life" should be read as more about concrete existence than about a phase of human history. As we will see, this is related to crucial points about the significance of "the result" in Abraham's story.

(4) The object of faith that Abraham believes "by virtue of the absurd" is clearly not God's command but rather Isaac's miraculous survival: beyond infinite resignation, Abraham's second movement is to say "but it will not happen, or if it does, the Lord will give me a new Isaac" (FT 115/SKS 4, 115; compare FT 36/SKS 4, 131). In later works too, the movement of faith by "virtue of the absurd" is not obedience to God's command, which can stop within infinite resignation, but a further movement by which one regains "the finite . . . whole and intact" (FT 37/SKS 4, 132–33; compare FT 49/SKS 4, 143). For example, consider a key passage in the late signed work *Practice in Christianity*, where Kierkegaard says that "the miracle . . . is the object of faith" (PC 126/SKS 12, 131). Silentio refers to the faith that trusts in such an outcome as "the marvel" (FT 51/SKS 4, 145; FT 79/SKS 4, 170) because it is willed conviction in something astounding: "Abraham's receiving back Isaac *by marvel*," as *Problema* I puts it. Similarly, when God's promise begins to be fulfilled by Isaac's birth despite its biological impossibility, Silentio calls this "the fullness of time" (FT 18/SKS 4, 115) – the same phrase used for the birth of Christ in Kierkegaard's signed

religious writings. Similarly, in *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus uses the "fullness of time" for the unique moment in which the teacher as savior gives the learner the condition that turns him back toward God (PF 18/SKS 4, 22–23): it refers to a miracle by divine grace, rather than obedience to any command. Silentio also describes the Virgin Mary as a knight of faith for trusting in the "wonder" that God's child would be conceived within her (FT 65/SKS 4, 158). The association of faith with awaiting and trusting in key "moments" of time full of encounter with the divine runs throughout both Kierkegaard's signed and pseudonymous works.

Is eschatological trust only 'preliminary' to obedience? A response to Westphal

However, Westphal raises at least two other important objections to the eschatological interpretation. He concedes that the contrast between the knight of faith and infinite resignation teaches that "Faith is trust in divine promises," while still arguing that the *different* contrast between the knight of faith and the tragic hero (mainly in *Problema* I) teaches that "Faith is obedience to divine commands."[20] And he insists that the Tragic Hero of *Problema* I is distinct from the "knight of infinite resignation" of the "Preamble from the Heart" (as this section is termed in Hannay's translation). More generally, he claims that the contrast between infinite resignation and faith in the "Preliminary Expectoration" (as the same section is termed in the Hongs' translation) is *only* preliminary to the more important or essential distinction between the tragic hero and knight of faith in the subsequent *Problemata*, where it is emphasized that Abraham would have given up Isaac by *killing* him (as the three tragic heroes do with their children). I agree with Westphal that this aspect is de-emphasized in the "Preliminary Outpouring from the Heart" (Walsh's translation) to make clearer the parallel between Abraham and the young lad who believes that he will get his princess by miracle. But I disagree with Westphal's claim that "the first paradox and the first contrast" between resignation and faith are "preliminary to the second paradox and second contrast" between tragic heroism and faith because the first gives us

> only an aspect, a necessary but not sufficient condition of authentic Abrahamic faith … Only when trust in divine promises enacts itself in obedience to divine commands, with all that entails (which is what these

[20] Westphal (2014), pp. 37–38. Compare p. 33: "Abraham believes 'by virtue of the absurd' that he will get Isaac back."

> three problems [i.e., the problemata] are about) do we have faith fully present.[21]

I agree that faith in Silentio's existential sense is not constituted purely by trust in a divine fulfillment of a good that lies beyond the trusting agent's power without any sense of obedience to God. On the contrary, the eschatological account as reformulated here is more explicit that obedience to divine authority is essential to existential faith. Infinite resignation as a limit point in ethical willing becomes religious only when it includes this sense of obedience. Rather, my disagreement with Westphal simply concerns the *priority* he gives to the obedience-aspect over the aspect of trust in divine promises, for it is the other way around in *Fear and Trembling*. The highest kind of infinite resignation includes obedience to God, but *this* is only a necessary and not sufficient condition for faith: as many commentators have now noted, the alternative "Abrahams" of the "Exordium" section (also translated as "Attunement" or "Tuning Up") manifestly obey God's command but still *fail* to have faith (FT 10–14/SKS 4, 107–111). However, trust in miraculous redemption becomes mere aesthetic hope for satisfaction if it does not also contain obedient ethical striving to the point of infinite resignation (FT 47/SKS 4, 141).[22] Thus the *sufficient* condition for faith is a kind of trust in divine fulfillment of our pure ethical striving, which implies that the necessary condition is already met; this is what Silentio means in describing faith as a second movement in which the first movement of resignation is *aufgehoben* and preserved in new form (FT 37/SKS 4, 132–33; FT 46/SKS 4, 140–41). This movement of absolute trust that the ethical can be fulfilled (rather than violated) because "for God all things are possible" (FT 46/SKS 4, 141) – *this* is what enabled Abraham to grasp again "the whole temporal realm" (FT 49/SKS 4, 143), to gain everything and keep Isaac (FT 22/SKS 4, 118), to get "a son a second time" (FT 9/SKS 4, 105). Silentio's emphasis is constantly on this miracle that brings about a good that the agent tried with all her power to reach, and accepted that she could not achieve by herself: "By faith, Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac" (FT 49/SKS 4, 143).

Problema I *continues* this focus: its discussion of the teleological suspension of the ethical begins with the claim that "a person's eternal salvation" is his essential telos (FT 54/SKS 4, 148) – that is, the telos toward which the ethical is suspended is the eschatological good. This is the true meaning of

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[22] This helps explain a wrong way of focusing on "the outcome" – see the last section of this chapter.

the "teleological suspension of the ethical," as I have argued in past essays. To this I add five further points beyond those listed above.

(1) The Danish "Foreløbig" can mean "preliminary," "provisional," or leading-in; but little can be inferred from this term. With an author like Kierkegaard, we cannot infer much from a section title like "Preliminary Expectoration" or "Preamble"; for the same author titled a 630-page book a mere "Postscript" to a 111-page book. Does that mean that the *Postscript* is of far less significance in Kierkegaard's view than the *Philosophical Fragments*, or *Scraps* as it is sometimes translated? Is *Two Ages* a mere "literary review?" Does the title *Either/Or* imply that the author is just indifferent between the options? Given this record, whether contents of the "Preliminary Expectoration" are secondary to those of the *Problemata* or (as I claim) provide the main clues for understanding the *Problemata* must depend on considerations independent of the title.

For example, the schema relating resignation to faith in this section implies that it must be the *same* obligation to which the ethical agent responds that is "suspended" and yet retained in faith according to *Problema* I. In fact, the basic schema of the two movements (resignation + trust in God = faith) is simply *elaborated* in all three of the *Problemata*: this schema is "preliminary" *only* in the sense of giving the decisive conditions that the subsequent contrasts between tragic heroism and faith, between an indirect relation to God via ethical duty and a direct relation in faith, and the communicability of universal duties versus the incommunicability of the intentional object of faith all *further* illustrate, clarify, and flesh out (often with specific intent to critique Hegel's way of putting ethics above religion too – a *secondary* task that is particular to *Fear and Trembling*, but not to some other Kierkegaardian texts that use and develop the fundamental resignation-in-faith schema). So the contents of this crucial section are not "preliminary" in the sense of training wheels we can throw away when we ride fully, but rather in the sense that an architect laying out the fundamental design of a building then leaves further details to be filled in by her or his apprentices.

(2) This is confirmed by the evidence that tragic heroism is a *species* of infinite resignation as a genus: all tragic heroes in Silentio's sense are knights of infinite resignation, but not the converse (the young lad is resigned but he is not a tragic hero). In *Problema* II, right after referring to infinite resignation, Silentio adds a footnote on the way that "The tragic hero assures himself that the ethical obligation is wholly present in him by transforming it into a wish" (FT 78, note */SKS 4, 169). In other words, he infinitely resigns the lower ethical ideal that he can now only wish for,

keeping it as an abstract ideal. And as Westphal notes, "Silentio imagines himself as a Knight of Infinite Resignation" and yet also describes "himself as a tragic hero, though he will shortly use the tragic hero to illustrate a very different dimension of Abrahamic faith" (see FT 34/SKS 4, 130).[23] Thus the first mention of tragic heroism in the Preliminary section occurs when Silentio is explaining that in Abraham's place, he would have gotten only to "immense resignation" in sacrificing Isaac and with him "all my joy," leaving God's love as a pure eternal ideal without relevance to this world in time (FT 35/SKS 4, 130). This is the same basic contrast that the young lad and princess analogy illustrates. So the basic difference of the knight of faith from the tragic heroes of *Problema* I is the *same* as his difference from an infinite resigner:

> But if in the crucial moment, these men were to append to the heroic courage with which they bore the agony the little phrase: 'But it will not happen anyway' – who then would understand them? If they went on to explain: 'This we believe by virtue of the absurd' – who would understand them any better? (FT 58–59/SKS 4, 152)

The tragic hero is distinguished from other knights of infinite resignation by allowing one ethical ideal to be trumped by, or expressed in, "a higher expression of the ethical" (FT 59/SKS 4, 152). In such cases, the lower ethical norm requires something that is an *obstacle* to fulfilling the higher ethical ideal; the tragic hero is distinguished by the kind of obstacle he faces. To strengthen the comparison with Abraham, Silentio's examples all involve sacrificing a child, but that is not essential to tragic heroism per se. A person who violates a solemn duty of her profession (knowing she will lose her job) because there is no other way to fulfill an ethically higher purpose will count as a tragic hero. What is most crucial about tragic heroism is the infinite resignation in it, which Anti-Climacus calls the "qualification of spirit" that is able to accept obligation independent of "whatever else happens" (SUD 57/SKS 11, 54–55).

(3) The specific purpose of the narrower contrast between tragic heroism and faith, which is to show (*pace* Hegel) that religiousness is not simply a higher form of *ethical* consciousness, means that tragic heroism is less relevant in *Problema* II and III, although infinite resignation remains relevant throughout. *Problema* II refers again to Socrates' "infinite

[23] Westphal (2014), p. 33 and n. 14. Westphal speculates that "perhaps infinite resignation is a necessary condition for being a tragic hero as well as for faith" (n. 14), and that seems correct. But it also suggests that infinite resignation is the wider and more basic category. Climacus confirms that Silentio considers himself a tragic hero (CUP 262/SKS 7, 195–96).

resignation" as the "movement of the infinite," and tells us that "only when the individual has emptied himself in the infinite" can faith "break through" (FT 69/SKS 4, 162). Silentio also tells us that the "knight of faith has the passion to concentrate in one single point the whole of the ethical ideal that he [seemingly] violates" (FT 78/SKS 4, 169), which is exactly the formula for infinite resignation given in the Preliminary section (FT 45/SKS 4, 139–40). The point is clearly that the knight of faith must also be infinitely resigned (not that he must also be a tragic hero).

Similarly, in *Problema* III, we are told that the tragic hero displays "ethical courage" in acting on discloseable reasons (FT 87/SKS 4, 177), which are twin conditions of all infinite resignation. But the subsequent examples range widely. The bridegroom whose marriage has been cursed may perhaps count as a tragic hero in giving up his bride, but the obstacle he faces is not a divine command to give her up (FT 90–92/SKS 4, 180–82). Like the young lad, the bridegroom will not renounce his love, and so he might end up with a lasting devotion that is unfulfillable (FT 91/SKS 4, 180–81). The merman is not stymied by any divine command but rather by the curse forbidding him to accept freely given love, allowing him only love as spoils of conquest (FT 95/SKS 4, 184) – the obstacle in his case. In response to Agnes' infinitely trusting innocence, he becomes a knight of repentance, which is another species of infinite resignation – Silentio says it is "the highest ethical expression" (FT 98 note */SKS 4, 188). But if the merman could trust that by divine dispensation, Agnes could somehow remain with him despite his curse, he might have both "Agnes and repentance" (FT 96/SKS 4, 185). Like the young lad, the merman as knight of faith would believe that he could get his beloved by God's power:

> The merman . . . cannot belong to Agnes without, after having made the infinite movement of repentance, making one movement more: the movement by virtue of the absurd. He can make the movement of repentance under his own power, but he also uses absolutely all his power for it, and therefore cannot possibly come back under his own power and grasp actuality again. (FT 99/SKS 4, 189)

Obviously, the structure of the merman's situation here parallels that of the young lad and Abraham's, except that they each face different obstacles to the realization of the ideal good in time. The merman's infinite resignation is not of the tragic hero's specific kind though; to stop at the limit of ethical willing, he only needs to repent without subsequent faith and release Agnes.

The merman typifies "demonic" agents who are blocked from fulfilling the ethical by some "thorn in the flesh." The demonic in this sense is an analogy for sin as a radical obstacle, which is like already being a murderer. And Silentio brings up "sin" as an exile from the universal immediately after noting that when an individual like the merman has come "outside the universal, he can return" to it only through an "absolute relation to the absolute" (FT 98/SKS 4, 188) – the formula for faith in *Problema* II. Similarly, Anti-Climacus explains that some persons who suffer from such an obstacle despair defiantly by being "unwilling to hope in the possibility that an earthly need, a temporal cross, can come to an end" (SUD 70/SKS 11, 69). On the contrary, such a defiant agent wills to be himself as marred by his thorn: "Hope in the possibility of help, especially by virtue of the absurd, that for God everything is possible—no that he does not want . . . he prefers to be himself with all the agonies of hell" (SUD 71/SKS 11, 69–70). Clearly the faith that such a defiant agent refuses consists primarily in trusting that the obstacle to one's ultimate good can be overcome in a way that is possible only for God. It does not consist in obeying some other singularizing command, but in obeying the command to believe in "the 'Helper' for whom all things are possible" (SUD 71/SKS 11, 70).

(4) Anti-Climacus says nothing about transcending cultural convention or social morality, but he gives us a formula for what I have called "eschatological possibility" when he refers to the object of faith as something beyond all calculable "probability," in which God "render[s] possible that which surpasses the *quantum satis* of any experience" (SUD 41/SKS 11, 37). While vacuous human beings may lose themselves in possibility without any sense of necessity, especially the necessity of ethical obligation (SUD 36/SKS 11, 31–32), there is another form of despair like fatalism in which the sense of necessity lacks corresponding possibility:

> At this point, then salvation is, humanly speaking, utterly impossible; but for God everything is possible. This is the battle of faith, battling madly, if you will, for possibility. (SUD 38/SKS 11, 34)

The two movements of Silentio's Preliminary Outpouring reappear here: the believer is infinitely resigned "and understands his downfall, humanly speaking," in an obstacle beyond human power to remove. But he trusts in divine aid: "so God helps him—perhaps by allowing him to avoid the horror, perhaps through the horror itself—and here, unexpectedly, miraculously, divinely, help does come" (SUD 39/SKS 11, 35). In other words, he believes but is still surprised by joy, because he cannot predict the way in which God will bring about the fulfillment of the good.

I think these comparisons with *Sickness* are decisive in favor of the eschatological reading of *Fear and Trembling*. Also consider that it is infinite resignation rather than tragic heroism that is central to the account of religiousness A (and its distinction from religiousness B) in the "Essential Expression" and "Decisive Expression" sections of the *Postscript*. As I have argued, infinite resignation is also equivalent to willing the good "in truth" in Kierkegaard's signed account of *Purity of Heart*;[24] thus its centrality to *Fear and Trembling* is reinforced by its importance in later works.

(5) Still, perhaps the final crucial proof is that Kierkegaard published *Fear and Trembling* together with *Repetition* (FT xviii), which considers another biblical narrative in which the protagonist's faithful patience (or something close to it) culminates in "getting the world back," as Edward Mooney has aptly put it in several superb analyses of this text.[25] This eucatastophic outcome is a "repetition" in a sense that combines the ethical repetition of repeated effort or recommitment to one's ideals and aesthetic repetition in which return occurs by accident: for Job, it is a divine response affirming and fulfilling his good will.

Job's religion: 'repetition' as return of the good

Repetition, by the pseudonymous author "Constantine Constantius" is a complex work, and its title concept refers to a continuity that arises from earnest willing (R 145/SKS 4, 27–28), "the watchword in every ethical view," because it applies the same idea again in new ways through ever-renewed dedication (R 149/SKS 4, 34). Such repetition gives us a volitional identity of the kind that ethics concerns. Without this sort of thematic unity, as Constantius says, one is "not even capable of appearing in person on Judgment Day," but is represented instead by "twenty-four hour resolutions, half-hour plans, etc." (R 155/SKS 4, 43). In other words, only through volitional repetition do we acquire a committed identity that could be judged as authentically good or evil. But the young man who confesses to Constantius about his unhappy love relation with a girl cannot achieve this thematic unity by his own effort:

> He still firmly believes that, humanly speaking, his love cannot be realized. He has now come to the border of the marvelous; consequently, if it

[24] See Davenport (2012), ch. 4.

[25] For example, see Mooney (1996), ch. 3; Mooney (2007), ch. 9; and Mooney's introduction to Kierkegaard (2009b).

> [repetition] is to take place at all, it must take place by virtue of the absurd. (R 185/SKS 4, 89)

This formula for religious repetition is the same as that found in that disputed Preliminary section of *Fear and Trembling*; the difference from Silentio's tale of the young lad is that the good sought by the young man in *Repetition* is disjunctive – to be reconciled with his erstwhile beloved either by returning to her in sincere love *or* being freed from her without her further suffering. And the obstacle in his case is not social convention that bans marrying outside one's class, but his sense that he has "wronged her by disorganizing her life" (R 184/SKS 4, 88) because he could not follow through on his initial erotic love for her. So his case is more complex (and less admirable) but the formal structure is similar to Silentio's young lad.[26]

This point is reinforced by the young man's letters concerning the sufferings of Job, in which he sees a higher version of his own predicament. In his portrayal, it is less clear that Job is a knight of faith, because Job's conviction is simply that he will be vindicated as right according to ethical ideals without clearly trusting in a concrete temporal manifestation of this. But Abraham is also vindicated by faith: his intention is not simply that of a murderer, although ethical reasoning must portray him that way. Let me briefly enumerate the key aspects of this parallel:

1. Like Abraham, Job is portrayed (from a pre-Christian viewpoint) as without sin; it is crucial to his story that he was *in the right*, not suffering just punishment when he lost everything (R 207/SKS 4, 123–24). This is the expression of willing the good in his story: Job holds to the conviction that the loss of his family is inherently unjust; analogously in Abraham's case, the permanent death of Isaac would also be inherently wrong. Thus the parallel Kierkegaard sets up suggests that God's command can no more make Isaac's permanent death by murder good than it could make Job's permanent loss of everything just or deserved.
2. Like Abraham, Job achieves infinite resignation in the face of losing everything: he continues to will the good in truth, which is the most noble expression of human spirit and free will (R 208/SKS 4, 124–26). In his case, this includes affirming his sense of his own moral identity.

[26] Of course Mooney is correct that, unlike the young lad in *Fear and Trembling* and Job, the young man in *Repetition* exemplifies neither infinite resignation nor faith; his case merely mimics their formal structure (see Mooney 2007, p. 164). The key point about that formal structure is that religious repetition, unlike its ethical variant, is not something achieved by human striving or intentionally aimed at (pp. 163 and 167).

3. Like Abraham, Job's infinite resignation is expressed in acceptance that there is no "humanly" possible way to bring about or predict the restoration of the family that is lost: for him, the repetition will occur "[w]hen every *thinkable* human certainty and probability were impossible . . . From the point of view of immediacy, everything is lost" (R 212/SKS 4, 131). Just as for Abraham in *Problema* III, it is this movement beyond what is possible for *human agency* to the miracle which is possible only for God that makes it impossible for Job to communicate his conviction directly to others (such as his false "comforters").
4. Still, Job lacks Abraham's kind of faith; he resides on the "boundary" of faith in a struggle with God, an "ordeal" involving direct personal encounter with God (R 210/SKS 4, 127–29). In him "are manifest the love and trust that are confident that God can surely explain everything" and thus restore the right (R 208/SKS 4, 125). So Job is not a *mere* knight of infinite resignation either, because he believes in some concrete final resolution: "to him in relation to God, all his troubles are but a sophism that he . . . cannot solve, but he trusts that God can do it" (R 207/SKS 4, 123). His trust that he will be affirmed may be a form of what Climacus later calls "religiousness A," which looks to ultimate justice beyond this life without a clear hope for its manifestation in embodied temporal form.
5. So Job is also not like a "demonic" person who comes in resignation to the limit of mortal power but then actively refuses faith in offense (R 207/SKS 4, 123–24). Job is in the "*confinium*" at the edge of faith. Yet, as in Tolkien's descriptions of joy through experiencing eucatastrophe, his hope may be enough for Job to receive everything back with joy.
6. Finally "Job is blessed and has received everything *double*."[27] This is called a "*repetition*" (R 212/SKS 4, 130). But it is not an aesthetic repetition (which Constantius proves to be strictly impossible to secure by human planning and effort), nor the repetition involved in continuity of ethical willing. Repetition in the third sense, that is religious repetition, is the (wide-sense) eschatological fulfillment of the good in concrete actuality, in a new immediacy (R 212/SKS 4, 130–31). As Mooney writes, Abraham and Job both await repetition as a wondrous

[27] Except his children, as the young man notes: "for a human life cannot be redoubled in that way" (R 221/SKS 4, 142). This is an affirmation of the value of each individual as unique and thus irreplaceable.

gift "beyond all choice and control"; they share "faithful trust in a fulfilling restoration" of the good.[28] And while Constantius himself manifestly lacks Job's kind of quasi-faith (R 218/SKS 4, 139–39), the young man in his story hopes for an ethically restorative turn beyond his own power and receives it when the young woman marries another man: the split in his soul is thereby healed (R 220/SKS 4, 141–42).

One must conclude from these comparisons that Kierkegaard intended to clarify Abraham's faith by way of Job, perhaps conceiving him as a figure somewhere between ethical resignation and faith in the strict sense. But Job's quasi-faith involves no response to a special command; it only requires loving and trusting in God as fulfiller of the good. As Brian Gregor says, repetition is like a narrative refiguration that returns what was lost in a renewed form, but "Kierkegaardian repetition occurs only as a gift of transcendence."[29] In sum, *Repetition* suggests that the components of faith listed earlier from the Preliminary section of *Fear and Trembling* are the crucial ones that we find in other cases of existential faith.

Conclusion: the Outcome or result, and the Luke passage

We can now briefly address two remaining prominent objections to the eschatological interpretation of Kierkegaardian faith. In an important essay, J. Michael Tilley has argued forcefully against simple "divine command" and "higher ethical" interpretations of *Fear and Trembling* but also challenged the eschatological reading as remaining too "teleological" by making Abraham's faith depend on the "outcome." Tilley rejects any interpretation that makes the religious category into an "absolute" claim that relativizes ethical norms of all rationally explicable kinds, because this kind of religious absolute itself becomes a kind of "reason" for Abraham's action that ignores the stated incomprehensibility of his faith.[30] But this view threatens to valorize incomprehensibility and apparent evil beyond what Silentio intends. As I have argued elsewhere,[31] *Problema* III does not mean to absolutize the incommunicability of the *content* of Abraham's

[28] Mooney, introduction to Kierkegaard (2009b), pp. xii, xiv. Perhaps partly due to Mooney's influence, this connection between Abraham and Job is widely recognized; for example, in ch. 7 of Tsakiri (2006), he argues that both leave themselves "completely in God's hands, by virtue of the absurd" (p. 131). Like Abraham, Job trusts that "God would eventually do him justice" (p. 135). Notably, Tsakiri recognizes that Abraham's belief that "God would not require Isaac" is the "absurd" or humanly impossible content in which he trusts (p. 142).

[29] Gregor (2005), p. 83. [30] Tilley (2012), p. 154. [31] See Davenport (2008b), (2008c).

faith (that Isaac will be restored by God's power). Silentio only means that this content cannot be rationally explained or defended – for example, by deductive or inductive reasoning from evidence comprehensible as evidence to others – not that it cannot be stated in human sentences that have commonly accessible *sense*. Obviously if that were Silentio's claim, there would be no point in trying to explain what he means by Abraham's faith; but then, why would he use so many analogies and contrasts to try to shed light on it? Abraham's faith is not blind; he responds to something, and that is his absolute telos as Silentio says. By contrast, if a *completely* "non-teleological" reading requires Abraham to be acting with no coherent intention and hope at all, it is in danger of leaving no place for "teleological suspension" and the ground of faith as an absolute telos.

Tilley also holds that the suspension in *Fear and Trembling* is not "suspension-as-preservation" but rather "suspension-as-annulment."[32] In other words, he argues that what distinguishes Abraham from the tragic heroes of *Problema* I is that "for Abraham there is no higher telos, not an ethical or religious one that relativizes and incorporates the ethical."[33] Similarly, he says that "Abraham's higher telos provides no alternative structure – no higher ethical theory; it is suspension as annulment rather than as preservation."[34] But despite some textual evidence Tilley offers for this view, such as the passage (which has confused many readers) in which Silentio says that Abraham "transgressed the ethical altogether and had a higher telos outside it," it cannot be correct because it conflicts with the *cumulative* relation among Kierkegaard's existential categories that we have found not only throughout *Fear and Trembling* but also in all Kierkegaard's major works from *Either/Or* to *Sickness Unto Death*: ethically inspired willing must remain within existential faith or else infinite resignation does not continue in religiousness.

Tilley is also concerned that the telos in the eschatological interpretation emphasizes the outcome of Abraham's drama, which conflicts with

[32] Tilley (2012), p. 158. [33] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 162. The mistake in Tilley's otherwise forceful analysis is his underlying assumption that a religious telos that "preserved" ethical ideals and striving within it (as sublated) would be rationally comprehensible, and something at which the agent could thus rationally aim in suspending an ethical norm – in short, it would be a higher *ethical* telos. In other words, suspension as preservation would give us that wrong kind of telos. But this begs the question against the eschatological interpretation, because the latter claims to show that a (broadly) eschatological resolution constitutes a kind of telos that preserves and indeed vindicates ethical ideals (such as the parent's devotion to her/his child), a telos in which we can trust, though (in contrast to an ethical telos) we do not act with the intention of bringing it about. So the limits of ethical directives and intentions that respond to them are not the limits of *all* kinds of teleology.

Silentio's insistence that "the result" of "receiving Isaac by marvel" is not (qua outcome) what *justified* Abraham (FT 63/SKS 4, 163).[35] But when Silentio says that someone who only ponders the "outcome" of Abraham's story "cheats himself and cheats God out of the first movement of faith" by wanting to "suck worldly wisdom out of the paradox" (FT 37/SKS 4, 132), he has in mind the aesthetic simulacrum of faith noted earlier: this person wants to skip the resignation in which we purify our ethical devotion of its need for any worldly hope for rewarding results, and instead think of faith as a means to extract good outcomes from God. The eschatological reading makes clear that Abraham does not *bring about* the outcome by manipulating God.

On this reading, what justifies Abraham is not the result (as a good consequence) but rather Abraham's *obedient and loving trust* that God will bring about the good outcome, one way or another; and Abraham has to will the good to the extreme of resignation to get to this point. It is not "what happens" (the result) but rather his faithful intention that makes him great (FT 64/SKS 4, 156). Abraham's action is both ethical and religious because, while he intends to kill Isaac, his trust in God allows him to believe that Isaac will not thereby be made *permanently* dead. It is this combination of attitudes that makes Abraham the exemplar of faith – though the outcome itself remains important in the sense that faith could be falsified or made correct. This is the ambiguity of the outcome in which Abraham has faith: it is not contingent on a "new Isaac" being restored instantly if he died in the sacrifice. Arguably, even if Abraham had died without Isaac yet being restored to earthly life, he could have continued to have faith into his dying moment.[36]

These points also allow me to respond to a final important objection, namely that the eschatological reading does not square with Silentio's claim that we must take "literally" the passage in Luke according to which the faithful follower of Christ must "hate" family members[37]

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 163, n. 73, in which he responds to my account. This focus on the outcome is what Tilley thinks is wrong with Magnus Eiriksson's reading of *Fear and Trembling* that caused Kierkegaard to reject it. But Kierkegaard does not say exactly what he dislikes about Eiriksson's reading; it seems to be partly that Eiriksson is too confident that he himself has faith (FT 266, from JP 4, 6601/PAP X 6 B 82, dated 1850). Kierkegaard starts to imagine the pseudonym "Anti-Climacus" in response.

[36] As argued earlier, this is compatible with the extended sense of Abraham's faith "for this life;" for the concreteness of earthly life extends to future generations beyond Abraham's own time on this earth. I am grateful to Tilley for pressing me to clarify this point.

[37] This objection was generously pressed by Gordon Marino following my Utech Memorial Seminar presentations at St. Olaf College in June 2012.

(FT 72–73/SKS 4, 163–65) – apparently in the sense of giving highest loyalty to Christ's will. However, the metaphorical interpretation that Silentio is concerned to reject is that we are required to become "indifferent" to our family members; he emphasizes that the God "who demands absolute love" cannot think that love of God is proven by loving family members less than before (FT 73/SKS 4, 165). Instead, he understands the task of "hating" and "loving" at the same time as part of the paradox of faith. So, in fact, Silentio endorses what most contemporary readers would regard as another kind of metaphorical interpretation:

> The absolute duty [to God] can lead one to do what ethics would forbid, but it can never lead the knight of faith to stop loving. Abraham demonstrates this. In the moment he is about to sacrifice Isaac, the ethical expression for what he is doing is: he hates Isaac. But if he actually hates Isaac, he can rest assured that God does not demand this of him, for Cain and Abraham are not identical. He must love Isaac with his whole soul. (FT 74/SKS 4, 165)

Only then can his act count as sacrificing Isaac to God's demand.

Now the eschatological reading explains this well. On Silentio's account, the Luke passage means that faithful followers of Christ must be willing to act in ways that *seem* like hatred of family members, though in fact their love for their family endures. That is because they must be willing to trust in God absolutely for the ultimate fulfillment of the goods that their love wills for their loved ones (kin and friends), even when obstacles prevent them actively pursuing these goods in ways that are rationally explicable to others. In some cases of such absolute reliance on God, their love will be veiled, and even look like hate from a third-party viewpoint. But they do not really hate, just as they do not really murder.

Rather than challenging the eschatological interpretation then, Silentio's discussion of the Luke passage reinforces it. He generalizes from his reading of this passage to the point that the knight of faith must "concentrate in one single point the whole of the ethical that he violates, as we see with the young lad, and" as Abraham illustrates by loving Isaac "with his whole soul" (FT 78/SKS 4, 169). This corresponds precisely to the earlier claim that a knight of infinite resignation must will the ethical ideal wholeheartedly or with a pure heart: Abraham is such a knight, though he also "makes one movement more, whereby he gathers his soul back to the marvel" (FT 79/SKS 4, 170). His faith does not consist in "hating" Isaac by sacrificing him, but in loving him despite the absolute nature of the distinctive obstacle he faces.

I conclude that the eschatological approach remains the most promising way to make sense of the difficult central concepts in *Fear and Trembling*, and to relate them to the main themes in the larger corpus of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and signed works. This is why it continues to gain adherents and attract interest, and is likely to become in time the standard reading of this challenging text.

CHAPTER 6

The existential dimension of faith

Sharon Krishek

The universal significant of faith

Our existence is pervaded with sorrow. Loss – the painful absence of what one values – is silently present everywhere. The evident cases of loss – death, harsh diseases, horrors of war – are easy to discern, but all around we also find less conspicuous instances of loss. The hug of a young couple betrays the future challenges threatening their love; a new mother's gaze reflects the sorrow over her inevitable separation from the grown child; the smile of an elderly man expresses his recollection of years past and his sad acknowledgment of the approaching end. Confronted with loss, then, either evident or unnoticeable, one's existence may seem like a source of endless pain. Ephemeral, frail, doomed to extinction – can one nevertheless affirm life while suffering loss?

This chapter claims that Kierkegaard's analysis of Abraham's faith in *Fear and Trembling* offers a positive answer to this question. This may sound a little strange. After all, can Abraham's strikingly unusual and terrifying experience have anything in common with a range of experiences that, at least in their less severe forms, are the lot of every human being? What is the connection between Abraham's experience on Mount Moriah (that does not seem to bear even the most remote resemblance to one's ordinary experience) and the intimate and familiar experience of loss? As I shall attempt to show, Kierkegaard's analysis of faith turns the story of the Binding into a tale of the human condition.[1] Without making God's demand any less dreadful, and without making Abraham's response to that demand any less exceptional, Kierkegaard nevertheless retells the story in a manner that makes it relevant to every human being. Abraham's trial becomes an expression (albeit an exceptional one) of the 'existential drama'

[1] Although the work is signed pseudonymously by Johannes de Silentio, I shall attribute the ideas discussed here to Kierkegaard. (For a justification see Krishek 2009, pp. 138–41.)

involved in temporal, ephemeral, and finite human life. Accordingly, Abraham's *faith* becomes an inspiring model: a "guiding star that rescues the anguished" (FT 18/SKS 4, 117), a guiding star for all. My claim is that Abraham's faith manifests a desirable existential position: it exemplifies a unique way of approaching the loss that living in time entails.

Furthermore, understanding Kierkegaardian faith in this manner not only makes it universally relevant but also offers a way to address the puzzling paradox at the heart of Kierkegaard's account. Kierkegaard claims that faith does not stand on one 'movement' alone: the movement of faith presupposes the movement of resignation, thus turning faith into a *double* movement.[2] However, these two movements seem to imply opposing beliefs and attitudes. In the story of the Binding, for example, the movement of resignation indicates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, and accordingly his belief that Isaac is about to die. The movement of faith, however, indicates Abraham's belief that Isaac will nevertheless live. How can these two apparently contradictory beliefs (and thus positions) be maintained together? Presenting resignation as a position that manifests a deep understanding of human finitude on the one hand, and faith as the ability to discern the value of human (finite) existence and affirm it on the other, I will attempt to demonstrate how understanding faith existentially is the key to understanding the paradox of the double movement of faith.[3]

Forms of loss

Faith, I shall claim, is an uncompromising acknowledgment of one's temporality and it embodies a desirable response to loss. How is loss pertinent to faith? *Fear and Trembling*, a treatise on faith, presents us with a wide range of cases of loss, beginning with the undramatic loss that the

[2] By 'movement' Kierkegaard means what we may call 'inner action': the formation of mental states (such as willing, believing, feeling, etc.) into a position that effects, and actually shapes, ways of facing and approaching whatever befalls us.

[3] Using the term 'existential,' then, I refer to a person's ability (and responsibility) to shape his or her life, given the crucial limitations imposed by temporality and finitude. A notable reading of *Fear and Trembling* that also offers an existential interpretation of faith is Hall (1999). However, while my reading presents the movement of resignation as taking a highly positive role in faith, Hall understands it as a negative position that the believer needs to "annul" (see Hall 1999, pp. 26–39). Hoffman (2006) presents another interesting 'existential' study of *Fear and Trembling*: Hoffman emphasizes the significance of faith as allowing a desirable attachment to the world against the background of the frailty of such an attachment. His focus, though, is on the moral implications of such an attachment.

act of weaning a child exemplifies, and culminating with the highly dramatic loss that Abraham was on the verge of experiencing: the death of his child by his own hand. In between these two extremes we are acquainted with the loss of a lover and, somewhat enigmatically, with the loss embedded in the life of someone who seems to have everything (and thus, on the face of it, loses nothing). We shall return to these losses in due course, but let us begin, following Kierkegaard, with the kind of loss involved in an act which, being so mundane and natural, might strike us at first as alien to a discussion concerning loss, resignation, and faith: the act of a mother weaning her child.

> When the child is to be weaned, the mother too is not without sorrow that she and the child are more and more to be parted, that the child who first lay beneath her heart yet later reposed upon her breast will not be so close any more. Thus together they mourn this brief sorrow. Fortunate the one who kept the child so close and did not need to sorrow more! (FT 10/SKS 4, 110)

This is the third of four reflections on the experience of weaning a baby. These reflections serve as milder equivalents to four imagined versions of the Binding.[4] The latter present an Abraham who is willing to sacrifice his son, but nevertheless his faith fails him, and maybe even his resignation.[5] There is an affinity between the trial of Abraham and the physical as well as symbolic parting of the mother from her weaned baby. In both cases the intimacy of the relationship is shaken and threatened; in both cases there is a sense of betraying the child's trust; in both the parent is incapable of communicating to the child the reason for acting in such a way.

Thus, while the events themselves are of course incomparable (arguably, there is nothing that can compare to Abraham's trial), and the losses at their center are of a different form and degree, essentially the two events express the same thing. Revolving around the love of a parent for his or her child, both express the drama entailed in losing (in a sense that will soon be explained) that which one cares about most. For even though the loss confronting the weaning mother is obviously not as evident, nor as agonizing, as that of Abraham (who is facing the imminent death of his son), she experiences a painful loss nevertheless. The baby "who first lay beneath her heart . . . [and] later reposed upon her breast will not be so

[4] Many interpretations tend to disregard these seemingly inept equivalents. An interesting exception is Edward F. Mooney's interpretation that understands these equivalents as communicating the main theme of the work: "independence-in-relationship," as he puts it (see Mooney (1991), pp. 30–31).

[5] Thus, at the very beginning of his analysis, Kierkegaard warns us not to confuse Abraham's faith with his willingness to kill his son. It is *not* the latter that turns Abraham's position into a model of faith.

close any more." During pregnancy, the baby was an inseparable part of her. Nursing the newborn was in part a continuation of this inseparability: she and the baby were still entwined with each other, as it were. But now that the baby is older this intimate bond is about to break, and the pain it causes is mainly due to its symbolic aspect: it conveys what I shall term 'essential loss.'

While the term 'loss' often expresses the *actual* absence or termination of something, 'essential loss' expresses the condition of all temporal objects: given their ephemeral and finite nature, they are *necessarily* doomed to alteration and termination. Thus, even while present, they are *potentially* absent. The mother weaning her baby, for example, first experiences the actual loss of an era in her life; those days, weeks and months during which she and her baby had a particular relationship are over. As days, weeks and months always do: once they pass by, they and everything they entail are forever gone. But the mother also experiences a potential loss – the kind of loss that may or may not become an actual one – that threatens every human life and human relationship (untimely death, irreversible inflictions, bitter breaking apart). She knows that the older her baby becomes, the less secure her hold will be. And even if she and her baby are destined to be blessed with flourishing lives, an unavoidable parting is nevertheless in store for them: one day the baby will become an adult with an independent life. Thus, the sorrow that the weaning mother feels is rooted in the limited nature of her hold over her baby: in the essential insecurity (and instability) that typifies their relationship.

Indeed, this is a loss 'of the fortunate' – "fortunate the one" (FT 10/SKS 4, 110) who needs not suffer greater loss, who needs not withstand a harder trial – but it is painful nonetheless. More than that, being an example of *essential* loss, it reflects a problem which is central to human existence in general. And while there are many ways to respond to essential loss – through denial, anxiety, despair, bitterness, nihilism – there is only one way to respond to it *correctly*: through faith.

Thus, Kierkegaard chooses to tell about a mother weaning her child in the context of his discussion of faith (and at such an early stage of it) because, I suggest, he has a very clear point to make: the discussion that is about to follow is highly relevant to all. There are very few, if any, that face a trial such as Abraham's, but human life by nature presents us with many other trials. These trials differ greatly in extent and degree, but all of them can be addressed *adequately* only by the double movement of faith. 'Double,' because, as mentioned above, *faith presupposes resignation*: "whoever has not made [the movement of resignation] does not have

faith" (FT 39/SKS 4, 141).[6] So it is high time to ask: what does making the movement of *resignation* mean?

"[I]t would not be difficult for me to write a whole book," says Kierkegaard, "if I were to go through all the various misunderstandings, the awkward postures, the slipshod movements" (FT 38/SKS 4, 141) – that is, the many ways to distort resignation (in terms of both performing and understanding it). We therefore need to be very careful in our inquiry into the nature of this movement. Not only because it forms an essential part of faith (thus a proper understanding of faith requires a proper understanding of resignation), but also because it is easy to confuse resignation with positions that are very far from it. Let us look closely, then, at Kierkegaard's analysis of resignation, which he lays out by discussing a story of lost love.

Love for humans, love for God

The love story that Kierkegaard presents may seem at first sight like a commonplace story of unrequited love. There was a boy who was deeply in love with a girl (a princess), but the relationship could not be realized. Despite this failure, the boy refused to find a new love and was determined to stick firmly to his love for the princess. At this point, however, there is a twist. The heartbroken lover responds to the loss by performing the movement of resignation:

> The love for that princess became for him the expression of an eternal love, assumed a religious character, was transfigured into a love of the eternal being, which to be sure denied the fulfilment of the love but still reconciled him once again in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take from him. (FT 36–37/SKS 4, 138)

This passage presents two interesting claims, the first of which is as follows: in resignation, Kierkegaard claims, the love for the lost thing is transfigured into a love for the eternal being, namely for God. Now, we said that it is easy to mistake resignation for other attitudes. Kierkegaard's claim here no doubt contributes to the confusion between resignation and detachment, be it from the lost thing (say, the princess), or more broadly from the world.[7] His claim might mistakenly be taken

[6] Kierkegaard attaches to resignation the adjective 'infinite' and also talks about performing the movement of 'infinity.' His use of this term, in my view, indicates the religious character of resignation. As we shall see, the movement of resignation is performed in the context of maintaining a relationship with God and acknowledging divine will.

[7] See, for example, A. L. Hall (2002), p. 173; R. L. Hall (1999), pp. 35–39; Mooney (1991), pp. 49–50.

to express a process of sublimation: as if the broken-hearted lover, who cannot have the princess and does not wish to find a new (human) love, replaces his love for her (and for women in general) with a love for God. However, it is important to pay attention to Kierkegaard's exact words: he does not claim that love A (for the princess) is *substituted* by love B (for God), but rather that love A becomes an *expression* of love B. The former indeed implies an exchange of loves (he used to love the princess, now he loves God instead), but the latter implies the *preservation* of one love in the other, thus the continuation of one love through the other.

Let us demonstrate this point by looking at a simplified version of the same claim, imagining the case of a new father who just lost his wife: "The love for his dead wife became for him the expression of his love for the newborn, assumed a parental character, was transfigured into a love of the baby." Needless to say, there is no doubt that the father does *not* substitute his love for his wife for a love for their baby; the latter is by no means a sublimation of the former. Rather, it is easy to imagine that he continues to love his wife not only *while* loving the baby, but also *by* loving the baby. In *this* sense his love is transfigured: even if his love for his lost wife is still romantic in character (and thus distinguished from his parental love for the baby), he sustains a relationship with his lost wife through his new relationship with their baby.

Therefore, renouncing the princess (or any other lost object) does not mean being detached from her. The broken-hearted lover does not lose interest in her: he continues to care for her, to love her and to desire a relationship with her. Kierkegaard specifically says this more than once: "The knight of infinite resignation . . . *does not give up the love*, not for all the world's glory" (FT 35/SKS 4, 137, emphasis mine); "The wish . . . is now turned inward but *is not therefore lost or forgotten*" (FT 37/SKS 4, 138, emphasis mine); "Perhaps there was someone who found it sufficiently convenient that the wish was no longer alive, that the arrow of pain was blunted, but *such a person was no knight*" (FT 43/SKS 4, 145, emphasis mine).

However, recall that resignation is difficult to understand and easy to confuse with other attitudes. Another reason for this confusion might be the tendency to think of resignation as an act that brings a certain state to an end, rather than as a lasting *existential* position. Resignation is thus taken to be an action that causes one to forsake his or her desire: one wanted X, one could not have X, one renounced X, *thus* – one no longer wants X. Nonetheless, this is not the structure of resignation. We can

easily understand this if we pay attention to the conceptual meaning of the term 'resignation.' If A *renounces* X, it necessarily indicates that X is of importance to A; it is something that A desires. Otherwise A would not have described this act as *resignation*. If A was indifferent to X, then the pain and emotional effort, which make resignation into what it is, would not have been evoked. Thus, as long as A is characterized as *renouncing* (as indeed the knight of resignation is), A is, by definition, still attached to the object of his (or her) renunciation.

Resignation, then, is a position, *a state of existence*, characterized by a sustained desire for the lost thing and – given that the object of desire is taken to be unequivocally lost – by deep pain (the combination of desiring X and honestly considering X as lost cannot *but* result in deep pain). At the same time, resignation is also a state of reconciliation. This brings us to the second claim formulated in the aforementioned quote. The love that resignation brings to the fore, love for God, "denied the fulfilment of the love [for the princess] but still reconciled him once again in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take from him." It seems that the claim is that in resignation one's love for God reconciles one with existence (namely, endows one's existence with renewed meaning). It does so, I suggest, in a twofold way.

First, to be in a state such as that of the heartbroken lover – namely, to desire with all one's heart that which is lost – may quite naturally result in anger and bitterness. Frustration of one's will is often a source not only of pain but also of resentment. One may feel deprived of something that one is entitled to; something that should be "his" is unjustly being taken away from him.[8] But not so for the knight of resignation: he responds to the loss not with anger but rather, as we have seen, with love. How is this, emotionally speaking, possible?

Here it would be helpful to look at Kierkegaard's words when he imagines himself (or rather his protagonist, Johannes de Silentio) in place of Abraham, and understands that his ultimate reaction would have been resignation: "[t]he moment I mounted the horse," he imagines, "I would have said to myself: 'Now all is lost; God demands Isaac, I sacrifice him and with him all my joy – yet God is love and continues to be that for me'" (FT 29/SKS 4, 130). And a little later he reflects: "I could not make more than the infinite movement in order to find myself and once again be in equilibrium" (FT 29/SKS 4, 130). The knight of resignation, then, is

[8] Mooney describes this in terms of feeling a violation of one's proprietary rights (see Mooney 1991, pp. 53–54).

someone who is convinced that "God is love."[9] This, we may say, means (at the very least) that he takes God to be a loving entity whose love is directed also at him (namely, God is a loving God and thus loves him). Now, a loving entity, by definition, cannot will his harm: it is inconsistent to consider Y as loving X and at the same time as not willing X's well-being. Accordingly, the knight is confident that God, even when demanding the sacrifice of Isaac, the princess or anything else, wills his goodness. In other words, the knight has trust in God's providence.

The knight, therefore, takes it upon himself to adhere to God's will, even though God's will is not in harmony with his own. He thus submits his will to the will of God: while keeping alive his unfulfilled will, he no longer considers his volition as the faculty that determines his existence (namely, determines the way things are in the reality of his life). He accepts that it is God's will that does. Accordingly, he now "rests" in God's will: he is as sorrowful as can be, but not resentful or defiant. In this way the knight's love for God amounts to a state of reconciliation.

Second, making the movement of resignation, the knight gains a new understanding with regard to his love for the princess. He understands that this love does not stand alone, as it were: it is rooted in a more "primordial" love, his love of God. And as we saw, he now considers his love for the princess to be "the expression" of his love of God; he understands that by loving her, he had fulfilled his relationship with God all along. Thus, despite losing a love-relationship of immense importance – "the whole content of his life consists in this love" (FT 35/SKS 4, 137) – he is not deprived of love (and loving) altogether. On the contrary, he finds a new way to sustain his love for the princess, and therefore reconciles the fact that it cannot be fulfilled in the realm of actuality and finitude. "He nevertheless makes this impossibility possible by expressing it spiritually," says Kierkegaard, "but he expresses it spiritually by renouncing it" (FT 37/SKS 4, 138).

To put it differently, as a knight of resignation he realizes that his love for the princess (including, of course, his striving to fulfill this love) was a way to express his love of God, a channel through which his love of God passed and took a definite form. However, now that this channel is blocked – his hope for a relationship with the princess is frustrated – the

[9] This judgment begs at least two questions: first, what does it mean to say that 'God is love'?; and second, is there a causal connection between making the movement of resignation and accepting that 'God is love'? An exploration of these and other questions concerning this rather mysterious claim, however, is beyond the scope of the present chapter.

movement of resignation is precisely what enables him to keep *both* loves, albeit in an inverse way: now he gives form to his love for the princess by loving God. And as a knight of resignation (in contrast with the knight of faith, but more on this later), for him this is enough. His love of God allows him to maintain his love for the princess "spiritually," without any hope for further fulfillment in actuality. Thus, by losing her he has lost the center of his life, but he regains this center (and his "equilibrium") by conceiving of his love for God as a way to sustain – and validate – his love for the princess. In this way, too, the knight's love for God amounts to a state of reconciliation.

Resignation, then, is a state of love both for the lost thing and for God, and while being a radical release of one's hold of the former (having accepted it as undeniably lost), it forms an enhanced focus on the will of the latter. The knight of resignation gains a new understanding not only with regard to his love for the princess, but also with regard to himself: "[o]nly in infinite resignation do I become transparent to myself in my eternal validity," says Kierkegaard, "and only then can there be talk of laying hold of existence by virtue of faith" (FT 39/SKS 4, 141). The knight realizes that he is fundamentally constituted by his relationship with God and this paves the way for a new kind of getting hold of the lost thing. However, before turning to an exploration of faith (the only position that makes such a hold possible), there is another instance of resignation that we need to consider: resignation performed by a person who is not demanded to sacrifice a son, is not denied fulfillment of a love relationship with his princess, and is not even in the process of weaning a baby. But despite appearances, he is a knight of faith and thus necessarily also performs the movement of resignation. This common person, who "looks just like a tax collector" (FT 32/SKS 4, 134) and seems to be leading the most uneventful life imaginable, is nevertheless immersed in the sorrow of resignation.

The agony of finitude

After describing a day in the life of that average man – who "belongs entirely to the world" and whose stance is "sturdy, belonging entirely to finitude" (FT 32/SKS 4, 134) – Kierkegaard says the following:

> And yet ... this person has made and at every moment is making the movement of infinity. He empties the deep sadness of existence in infinite resignation, he knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything. (FT 34/SKS 4, 135)

This is rather surprising because the pain and difficulty of resignation seem alien to that person's mundane life (let us call him Knight M). After all, we analyzed resignation as a response to loss, but there is no evident loss in the life of M. What is the object of M's renunciation, then? Kierkegaard says that it is "everything" ("he has felt the pain of renouncing everything"); yet, what does it mean to renounce "everything"? All that we said of the heartbroken lover's resignation holds true for M's resignation, save one difference: while the loss that triggered the resignation of the former was an *actual* loss (of a love relationship), the latter's resignation is a response to the *essential* loss entailed in temporal existence.[10]

To put it differently, M's resignation is a response to the limits of existing in time, the limits of his finitude. To exist in time means to be subject to constant loss. Time goes by, and so does everything 'in' it: everything in time is ephemeral and thus doomed to change and, ultimately, annihilation. In this sense, to exist in time means to experience (1) the actual loss of time past,[11] (2) the potential loss of things that may pass with time in the future, and (3) the unavoidable final loss, which is the sad fate of all earthly creatures. This, obviously, is a painful truth, one that most humans, so Kierkegaard thinks, prefer to ignore or repress. But not Knight M, whose renunciation means precisely that his eyes are wide open. His gaze is lucidly directed at the loss of everything: everything that surrounds him, everything that he cares about, everything that he takes to be 'his own.' He sees everything as lost, because he realizes that temporality denies him a secure hold on anything.

Now, the essentiality of that loss (rather than its actuality) does not make it a less appropriate occasion for resignation. As Kierkegaard stresses, it is not necessary for an actual loss to occur in order for resignation to take place: "if one thinks that a cold, barren necessity necessarily must be granted, one implies thereby that no one can experience death before actually dying, which strikes me as a crass materialism" (FT 39/SKS 4, 141). The point is that resignation is an *existential* position; it is *always* relevant and valid, always remains a real possibility for us. Resignation is a new way to approach everything that we have (and everything that we desire), and it forms a new understanding of the status of 'everything.'

[10] See again the distinction drawn above (p. 109).

[11] Including the nearest past, of course. 'Yesterday,' or even 'the former moment,' are now gone forever. We are usually oblivious of this fact. Immersion in daily preoccupations and the succession of time – the reception of 'today' or of the 'present moment' – blur the loss already involved in such a routine passage of time. This kind of loss becomes noticeable when something dramatic occurs. Then, the irreversibility of time – the fact that we cannot return to a moment that has passed and hold it again – becomes painfully conspicuous.

In resignation the knight considers everything as belonging to God (rather than to him), and as subject to God's will (rather than to his desire). Thus, in the same way that the heartbroken lover accepts the *actual* loss of his princess, Knight M accepts the *essential* loss of everything: his loved ones, his (physical and spiritual) possessions, his days and nights, his life. He understands that while these seemingly belong to him, they in essence are not 'his own.' Accordingly, from the point of view of holding them securely, he has already failed: they are, in essence, lost to him.

Needless to say, such a state of existence, although reconciled, must be very sorrowful. Having renounced finitude (namely, everything in time), the knight of resignation is no longer capable of getting a hold of it – of getting himself wholly and joyfully involved with it. That is, unless he makes a further movement: the movement of faith.

The joy of faith

What makes the knight of faith "the only happy person"? Let us think of Abraham, the father of faith and the paradigm of someone who constantly performs the double movement. Kierkegaard describes his state of mind at the moment of the Binding in the following way:

> he believed that God would not demand Isaac of him, while he still was willing to sacrifice him if it was demanded. He believed by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation was out of the question, and it was indeed absurd that God, who demanded it of him, in the next instant would revoke the demand . . . Let us go further. We let Isaac actually be sacrificed. Abraham believed. He did not believe that he would be blessed one day in the hereafter but that he would become blissfully happy here in the world . . . He believed by virtue of the absurd, for all human calculation had long since ceased. (FT 29–30/SKS 4, 131)

This passage clearly expresses the paradox of faith: Abraham is described as someone who seems to maintain two contradictory beliefs. On the one hand, he believes that "God would not demand Isaac"; on the other hand, he has all the reasons to believe that God *would* demand Isaac ("it was indeed absurd that God . . . would revoke the demand"). On the one hand, believing that God would not demand Isaac, he seems to believe that Isaac will *live*. On the other hand, as far as he could see and predict, he was about to sacrifice Isaac and thus, from the point of view of his human understanding, was on the verge of bringing about Isaac's *death*.[12] In order

[12] See John Lippitt's sharp presentation of this paradox in Lippitt (2003), pp. 66–76.

to prevent misunderstandings with regard to Abraham's acceding to God's demand – and thus, accordingly, to the loss of Isaac – Kierkegaard changes the story and imagines that Isaac is indeed sacrificed. And still, "Abraham believed." What was the object of his belief; what did he believe *in*?

"By faith Abraham received the promise that in his seed all the generations of the world would be blessed" (FT 14/SKS 4, 114), Kierkegaard reminds us in an earlier stage of *Fear and Trembling*. Drawing the knife, Abraham continued to believe in God's promise: he had no reason to disbelieve the validity of the promise; he believes in God's word. Thus, while not being able to understand *how* and in what form this promise would be fulfilled ("God could give him a new Isaac, call the sacrificed one back to life" (FT 30/SKS 4, 131)), he nevertheless believes that it *will* be fulfilled.

Abraham's second movement of faith, then, is based on his *trust* in God's promise and, more generally, in God's goodness.[13] Indeed, the knight of resignation also has trust in God's goodness but, unlike the knight of faith, he cannot trust that it will be fulfilled in the realm of his finite existence. "[I]n temporality God and I cannot converse, we have no language in common" (FT 29/SKS 4, 130), reflects the one who cannot make the further movement beyond resignation (namely, Johannes). The knight of resignation cannot struggle through his inability to understand God's will, which he nevertheless undoubtedly takes to be good and loving. He thus gives up any hope of enjoying God's goodness in *this* life, and while gaining peace of mind in this way (because, after all, he need not grapple with any confusion: his expectations are in accordance with his understanding), he cannot be *truly* happy:

> I am convinced that God is love . . . But I do not believe; this courage I lack. To me God's love . . . is incommensurable with the whole of actuality . . . I can well endure living in my own fashion, I am happy and content, but my joy is not that of faith and in comparison with that is really unhappy. (FT 28/SKS 4, 129)

The gap between being convinced that 'God is love' (and thus willing his well-being) and being unable to understand God's will (as it operates *in the world*) is unbridgeable for the knight of resignation. What he lacks is the

[13] For a strong defence of interpreting *Fear and Trembling*'s faith as trust, see Davenport (2008a). Another recent reading that highlights trust (in realization of "the highest good") as the key to understanding the double movement of faith is Fremstedal (2011). His reading, however, focuses on the particularly Christian practice of faith and thus, in contrast with my reading, emphasizes a *non-universal* understanding of faith.

kind of trust that would have enabled him to see the possibility of God's will as intelligible (i.e., as operating in harmony with his human will) in finite, human temporality.[14] The knight of faith, however, while making the same movement as the knight of resignation, trusts in a way that the latter cannot. He trusts that God's will and his own will (which, recall, while denied is nevertheless kept alive in resignation) will converge in harmony in this world.

Abraham's position at the event of the Binding is of course the clearest manifestation of such trust. Drawing the knife – knowing (given his human understanding) that an act like this must lead to his son's death – he trusted that "he would become blissfully happy here in the world." Indeed, the ability to maintain such a belief, to sustain the gap between his act (the imminent killing of his son) and his expectation (the prospect that he will be blessed with a living son here in the world), cannot but be based on profound trust, "for all human calculation had long since ceased" (FT 30/SKS 4, 131).[15] At the same time, it is important to remember that Abraham's faith continues to be as strong as ever when the trial is over and he descends the mountain, holding with joy (one would imagine) his son's hand rather than a threatening knife. And if his faith is valid, then so is his resignation (because the latter is a necessary condition for the former). Therefore, Abraham continues to renounce Isaac (and, accordingly, to manifest trust) when no knife, demand, or impending death are involved.

And this brings us back to essential loss. True enough, Abraham's trial at the moment of the Binding, when he faces the possibility of the actual loss of his son, is incomparably harder than the trial of the heartbroken lover (who faces the actual loss of the love relationship with his princess) and, obviously, of Knight M (who faces the actual loss involved in the passage of time and the potential loss of any given thing *in* time). Accordingly, Abraham's resignation and faith are the most striking and evident examples possible and it is not accidental that Kierkegaard chose *this* story to demonstrate the paradigm of faith. However, in essence,

[14] Cf. Adams (1990), p. 392. See also Hannay (1999), p. 78.

[15] "Trust" is the faculty that enables one to maintain a belief even though one's reason is unable to support it. However, it is important to note that while exceeding human reason, trust (and faith) does not stand in contrast with it. Abraham did not believe that Isaac would be both dead and alive *at the same time* (that, indeed, would amount to a contradiction); he believed that even though Isaac might be dead in time X, he will nevertheless be alive at a proceeding time Y. The paradox of faith, thus, does not pose a logical problem but rather a practical one: the believer cannot attain the object of his faith – say, (the life of) Isaac, (the relationship with) the princess, (the security of) finitude – by his human powers alone (see also Hannay 2006, pp. 17–18).

although the losses involved are of different degrees, the faith required (in order to adequately respond to these different losses) is the same. Knight M is also an astonishing knight of faith and so is the knight of faith who "gets the princess." From the point of view of the existential drama that concerns us here, the three stories of faith are, structurally and essentially, the same. They all articulate the need to acknowledge the insecurity and often helplessness that temporality and finitude oblige us to experience, and their protagonists uncompromisingly accept the status of everything that they care about as profoundly lost. At the same time, and precisely against this background, the stories demonstrate the astonishing ability of their protagonists to affirm, with joy, their relation to the lost thing.

Knight M "has this confidence to delight in [finitude] as if it were the most certain thing of all . . . He constantly makes the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and proficiency that he constantly gets finitude out of it" (FT 34/SKS 4, 135). The knight of faith who gets the princess lives "joyfully and happily day in and day out with her." Indeed, "every moment" he sees "the sword hanging over the beloved's head" (namely, the essential loss threatening their relationship), but nevertheless he finds "not rest in the pain of resignation, but joy by virtue of the absurd" (FT 43/SKS 4, 145).[16] And what about Abraham? Abraham was "delighted to receive Isaac back, truly inwardly delighted" and needed "no preparation, no time to collect himself in finitude and its joy" (FT 30/SKS 4, 132). And, Kierkegaard continues, "[i]f that was not the case with Abraham, then he perhaps loved God but did not believe, for whoever loves God without faith considers himself, but whoever loves God with faith considers God" (FT 30/SKS 4, 132). Loving God is insufficient to constitute the highest relationship with God; something else is needed. Interestingly enough, this "something else" – namely, *trust* in God – is crucially expressed in one's relationship with the world.[17]

The deep joy in finitude – that only faith can bring about[18]– is based, then, on the trust of the believer in God's goodness and providence. This

[16] This is in contrast with the knight of resignation, who prefers to rest in the pain of resignation rather than to struggle with uncertainty and insecurity. Thus, even if this knight gets the princess, he is incapable of finding joy, since "his soul has clearly perceived the impossibility of their future happiness" (FT 43/SKS 4, 145): he surrenders himself to loss, lacking the ability to get a renewed hold of the lost thing by virtue of a trust in God.

[17] This may suggest that there is interdependence between one's relationship with God and one's relationship with the world. I elaborate on this idea somewhere else.

[18] The joy of faith is different from mere happiness or sheer enjoyment. The movement of resignation distinguishes faith from both a naive optimism and a careless hedonism. In the case of the former, the difference is that the optimist's declaration (when facing adversity) that "everything will be

trust enables the believer to gain hold of finitude while having absolutely released his hold of it. But no less, the joy in finitude is also rooted in the ability of the believer to discern and appreciate the *value* of the finite thing (which he considers both lost and gained at the same time). For to have one's life pervaded with consciousness of loss is to focus one's attention on the importance and worth of all objects of attachment. Usually we are too distracted or worn out to adequately pay attention to the objects of our attachment: we are used to their presence in our life and frequently take them for granted. If something threatens to take them away from us, however, the realization of their value is abruptly awakened and comes into focus. To be a knight of faith is to be able to habitually sustain this kind of 'awakening': seeing, by virtue of resignation, everything he or she has as lost, the believer is clear-sighted regarding its value. And unlike the knight who performs resignation *alone*, the knight of faith is capable of entering a relationship with valuable thing(s) not only with pain but also with hope and joy.

To conclude, the double movement of faith is very hard to imagine and extremely hard to perform.[19] Kierkegaard chooses the amazing story of Abraham – the least trivial story possible – to demonstrate the nature of faith because of his concern that people have trivialized and become blind to it. At the same time, Kierkegaard does not want his readers to conclude that faith is reserved exclusively for glorious heroes such as Abraham (and thus are themselves exempt from striving to adhere to the model of faith),

alright" is not based on trust but rather on a refusal to acknowledge the full extent of loss and human limitations. In the case of the latter, the difference is that the hedonist's immersion in finitude is not based on deep attachment but rather on seeking pleasure. This seeking is self-defeating, because the nature of temporality (and of pleasure) constantly leaves the hedonist with emptiness. For an elaboration of this latter point, see my discussion of aesthetic immediate love in Krishek (2009), pp. 20–24.

[19] Consider the following thought experiment: imagine that today is your last day on earth; tomorrow you will no longer be here. Imagine how painful it would be to know that this is your last time waking up in the morning and getting out of bed; that it is your last time walking down the street, seeing the sky, the trees and the flowers; that it is your last time seeing, touching and conversing with the people you love; that it is your last time seeing the sun set and the moon rise; that it is your last time hearing the silence of the night. In *Stages on Life's Way* Kierkegaard says: "Without a doubt, it is the most difficult mystery, just as it is also supposed to be the most profound wisdom, to arrange one's life as if today were the last day one lives and also the first in a sequence of years" (KW 9, 384). To continue our thought experiment, now imagine that having experienced a day as if it were your last, you now experience it as your first. You wake up in the morning again and get out of bed; you are walking down the street again, seeing the sky, the trees and the flowers; again you see, touch and converse with the people you love; again you see the sun set and the moon rise; again you hear the silence of the night. If we succeed in holding these two opposing (though complementary) perspectives together, we might begin to understand the emotional intensity of faith, and its relevance to every moment of our existence.

so he tells us the stories of the sorrowful lover and the joyful look alike "tax collector." In this chapter I attempted to delineate how these three stories of faith, when read together, expose and emphasize the existential dimension of faith. The scene of the Binding is arresting – God does not retract his demand, the knife is raised, the hand of God intervenes, Abraham is capable of holding Isaac again – but nevertheless the nature of temporality makes this unparalleled drama pertinent to every human being. Whoever one may be – a struggling lover, an anguished mother weaning her baby, a simple "tax collector" – existing in time makes every moment of one's life a potential trial of faith. The point of departure is always loss (actual or potential, visible or invisible, dramatic or mundane) and from there it is each individual's choice – existential choice – to decide how to respond to it. Would one ignore, repress or evade it? Would one accept it in resignation and surrender to inconsolable sorrow? Or maybe one would do the glorious: sustain the paradoxical tension that enables one, by virtue of trust, to gain a renewed hold of that which, in resignation, one accepts as lost. To do *this* is the greatest, "[f]or it is great to give up one's wish, but it is greater to keep a firm grip on it after having given it up; it is great to lay hold of the eternal, but it is greater to stick doggedly to the temporal after having given it up" (FT 15/SKS 4, 114). And thus, "only the one who draws the knife gets Isaac" (FT 21/SKS 4, 123): only the one who renounces finitude can joyfully and affirmatively exist in it.

CHAPTER 7

Learning to hope: the role of hope in Fear and Trembling

John Lippitt

Introduction

Kierkegaard's work contains rich discussions of several virtue terms: faith; courage; trust; patience; gratitude; humility; hope. Several recent interpretations of *Fear and Trembling* have connected Abraham's faith with some such related terms; for instance, a series of recent articles by John J. Davenport has treated faith as "eschatological trust,"[1] while Clare Carlisle places courage center stage.[2] I find myself increasingly attracted to the "faith as eschatological trust" reading. My purpose here is to try to complement Davenport's account, by putting more emphasis than is typical on the role of *hope* in Abraham's faith. (Although it plays a significant role in the eschatological trust interpretation, Davenport does not discuss hope in detail.) I aim to flesh this out by reading *Fear and Trembling* against the background of the 1843 discourse "The expectancy of faith," one of the discourses in which – as both Robert C. Roberts and William McDonald have noted – Kierkegaard discusses the concept of hope in most detail.[3] Then, after a brief outline of the "eschatological trust" reading of *Fear and Trembling*, I will discuss two possible objections thereto, arising from "The expectancy of faith." Both, I will suggest, can be resisted. The second can be addressed by comparing Abraham's hope with the "radical hope" discussed by Jonathan Lear in his book of that title. This reading will, I hope(!), clarify, in more detail than hitherto, the importance of hope in existential

A version of this chapter was presented as a keynote address at the conference "Kierkegaard in the World" (Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, August 2013). I would like to thank Patrick Stokes and Jeffrey Hanson for the invitation to speak at that valuable and enjoyable event and those in the audience whose questions and comments helped me to complete the final version. Thanks also to Dan Conway, whose feedback also helped me greatly with the final rewrite.

[1] See especially Davenport (2008a) and (2008c). Davenport acknowledges that it is "not entirely 'new', since it is indebted to past readings by Mooney, Evans, Hannay, Lippitt, and others" (Davenport 2008b, p. 885 n. 8).

[2] Carlisle (2010).

[3] Roberts (2003b); McDonald (2014).

faith. It will also throw some light on what Johannes de silentio calls "the courage of faith," and why he describes that courage as "humble."

Hope does not exactly leap off the page as an important theme in *Fear and Trembling*, and at one point Johannes contrasts faith with a "paltry [*usle*] hope" (FT 30/SKS 4, 132). The hope that plays a key role in Abraham's faith must be hope of a particular kind. I shall argue that it is akin to what Kierkegaard in the discourses calls "expectancy" [*Forventning*].

The expectancy of faith

In the *Works of Love* deliberation "Love hopes all things," Kierkegaard claims that to hope is to relate oneself in expectancy to the possibility of the good (WL 249/SKS 9, 249). The topic here is not merely "episodic" hope, but rather a hopefulness that is, as Roberts glosses it, a "formed disposition of the person of faith."[4]

Davenport briefly discusses this discourse in his reading of *Fear and Trembling*. But commenting on this connection, Alastair Hannay remarks that "the faith that is the topic of the discourse is surely closer to Abraham's attitude or state of mind before he received God's command than to the pathos-filled way he saw matters after receiving it."[5] I do not think this is true. Rather, on an "eschatological trust" reading, Abraham could respond – even in the face of the *Akedah* experience – in the way "The expectancy of faith" discourse suggests. That is what I shall argue in this section.

Aside from the fact that this discourse was published on May 16, 1843 (precisely five months before *Fear and Trembling*, published on October 16 of that year), there are several points in its discussion of faith that invite comparison with the later text, as we shall see.

What is faith's expectancy? Expectancy is clearly occupied with the future (EUD 17/SKS 5, 26), and such occupation is "a sign of the nobility of human beings; the struggle with the future is the most ennobling" (EUD 17/SKS 5, 27). Our ability to project ourselves imaginatively into the future is one of the things that separate us from the animals. Faith has already been presented in this discourse as "the only power that can conquer the future" (EUD 16/SKS 5, 25), and make one's life "strong and sound" (EUD 17/SKS 5, 27). But this battle with the future is really a

[4] Roberts (2003b), p. 187. Stan van Hooft contrasts "episodic" hope with hopefulness understood as "a character trait that marks a person's way of being for significant lengths of time, if not their whole life" (van Hooft 2011, p. 50). On the importance of hope at times of spiritual trial, in the face of anxiety and potential despair, Kierkegaard's early sermon at JP 4, 3915/PAP III C 1 is not to be missed.

[5] Hannay (2008), p. 242.

battle with oneself (EUD 18/SKS 5, 27), insofar as the only power the future has over us is that which we give it. (Compare this with *Fear and Trembling*, where in distinguishing the tragic hero from the knight of faith, Johannes says "to struggle against the whole world is a comfort, to struggle with oneself is frightful" (FT 100/SKS 4, 201).) The way to win this battle, the way to face the future, is compared to the tactic of the sailor who orients himself by looking up at the stars,

> because they are faithful; they have the same location now that they had for our ancestors and will have for generations to come. By what means does he conquer the changeable? By the eternal. By the eternal, one can conquer the future, because the eternal is the ground of the future, and therefore through it the future can be fathomed. (EUD 19/SKS 5, 28)

So: one conquers the future, oneself, by means of something constant, "the eternal." But the "eternal power in a human being" (EUD 19/SKS 5, 28) is precisely faith. And faith expects "victory," interpreted as that God is working all things together for good.[6] So is it this trusting expectancy or confidence which is at the heart of Abraham's faith?

Kierkegaard goes on to make several key comparisons that might remind us of the cast of characters in *Fear and Trembling*. First, we encounter a figure we might label *the naïve hoper*. This person's default attitude of hope, which "expects victory in everything" (EUD 20/SKS 5, 29), is simply the result of inexperience. The naïve hoper's real position, Kierkegaard suggests, is to expect "to be victorious without a struggle" (EUD 20/SKS 5, 29). Life will educate this person in the error of his ways, and he will learn that his expectancy, "however beautiful, was not the expectancy of faith" (EUD 20/SKS 5, 29). The naïve hoper makes a brief walk-on appearance in *Fear and Trembling*, in the guise of those "[f]ools and young people" who make the mistake of chattering "about everything being possible for a human being" (FT 37/SKS 4, 138). Johannes warns that what they fail to recognize is that whereas "Spiritually speaking, everything is possible . . . in the finite world there is much that is not possible" (FT 37/SKS 4, 138). What "fools and young people" fail to recognize, like the naïve hoper, is that it is only *with God* that all things are possible.[7]

Kierkegaard contrasts the naïve hoper with *the troubled person* (EUD 20/SKS 5, 29). This person *lacks* hope: he "expects no victory; he has all too

[6] Kierkegaard's text here glosses victory as "that all things must serve for good those who love God" (EUD 19/SKS 5, 28), an echo of Romans 8:28.

[7] Similarly, compare Kierkegaard's contrast between youthful and Christian hope at CUP 2, 70 (JP 2, 1668)/PAP VI B 53: 13; also EUD 437–8/PAP IV B 151: 3 and SUD 58/SKS 11, 173–74.

sadly felt his loss, and even if it belongs to the past, he takes it along, expecting that the future will at least grant him the peace to be quietly occupied with his pain" (EUD 20/SKS 5, 29). To the reader of *Fear and Trembling*, this character sounds like one dimension of Johannes' description of infinite resignation, in which "there is peace and rest and consolation in the pain" (FT 38/SKS 4, 140). Davenport argues that this person is not resignation *simpliciter*, but resignation explicitly combined with *the rejection of hope*. This is that variety of despair described in *The Sickness Unto Death* as not wanting (and thus refusing) "[h]ope in the possibility of help, especially by virtue of the absurd, that for God everything is possible" (SUD 71/SKS 11, 185).[8]

Both are frowned upon by *the man of experience*, the voice of "common sense" (perhaps a cousin of the worldviews that Kierkegaard sometimes calls "finite worldly wisdom" or "sagacity"). On this person's view, common sense suggests that one needs to take the rough with the smooth, such that neither naïve hope nor the complete absence of hope is justified:

> If one has almost every good one could wish for, then one ought to be prepared to have the troubles of life visit also the home of the happy; if one has lost everything, then one ought to consider that time reserves many a priceless cure for the sick soul, that the future, like a fond mother, also hides good gifts: in happiness one ought to be prepared to a certain degree for unhappiness, in unhappiness, to a certain degree for happiness. (EUD 20/SKS 5, 29)

Both the naïve hoper and the troubled person are willing to "lend an ear" to the man of experience, and to organize their lives accordingly. But such apparent common sense contains a threat. The man of experience's phrase "to a certain degree" (EUD 21/SKS 5, 30) "ensnares" his hearers. The initially happy person is troubled by the thought that this "certain degree" of unhappiness could apply just as easily to that one thing she cannot bear to lose without becoming unhappy as it can apply to those things she can far more readily give up. In this way, Kierkegaard warns, experience engenders *doubt* (EUD 21/SKS 5, 30).

Thus experience has the same potentially damaging effect as the words of *Fear and Trembling*'s "frogs in life's swamp," who tell the lad of Johannes' famous story that his love for the princess is foolishness, and

[8] Cf. Davenport (2008a), p. 226.

that "the rich brewer's widow is just as good and sound a match" (FT 35/SKS 4, 136). Note how much courage and resolution even the "knight of resignation" lad needs to resist their "common-sense" negativity. Having checked that the love really is "the content of his life," and "let it steal into his most secret, his most remote thoughts, to let it wind in countless coils around every ligament in his consciousness," he

> feels a blissful sensual pleasure in letting love palpitate through every nerve, and yet his soul is as solemn as that of one who has drained the cup of poison . . . – for this moment is one of life and death. Having thus imbibed all the love and immersed himself in it, he then does not lack the courage to attempt and risk everything. He surveys the circumstances of life and gathers the rapid thoughts which like well-trained doves obey his every signal; he waves a wand over them and they scurry in all directions. But when they now all return as messengers of sorrow and explain to him that it is an impossibility, he becomes quiet, dismisses them, remains alone, and then undertakes the movement. (FT 35/SKS 4, 136–37)

All three figures – the naïve hoper, the troubled person, and the man of experience – may be contrasted with *the person of faith* [*den Troende*], who says: "I expect victory" (EUD 21/SKS 5, 30). Yet against such a voice, enter now the voice of a cousin of the man of experience, "the earnestness of life" (EUD 22/SKS 5, 31), who teaches "that your wishes would not be fulfilled, that your desires would not be gratified, your appetites would not be heeded, your cravings would not be satisfied . . . it also taught you to come to people's aid with deceitful words, to suck faith and trust out of their hearts, and to do this in the sacred name of earnestness" (EUD 22/SKS 5, 31). However, Kierkegaard says, life could have taught a very different lesson: faced with just the same experience, two people may draw very different conclusions. Kierkegaard's example is of two children being praised, reprimanded or punished, comparing their possible reactions of proper pride or haughtiness; humility or indignation; a willingness to be healed by suffering or resentment. Now: all this points forward to what *Works of Love* says about hope and despair; trust and mistrust. Both have access to the same evidence. When obliged to judge in the wake of ambiguous evidence, the existential choices that we tend to make reveal something important about our character.[9]

Similarly, Kierkegaard adds, in the manner so typical of the discourses, "so also with you" (EUD 22/SKS 5, 31). We need to learn silence in the face of our doubts: "We do not judge you for doubting, because doubt is a

[9] Cf. WL 231/SKS 9, 233.

crafty passion, and it can certainly be difficult to tear oneself out of its snares. What we require of the doubter is that he be silent. He surely perceived that doubt did not make him happy – why then confide to others what will make them just as unhappy?" (EUD 23/SKS 5, 31–32).

The key thing is that the expectancy of faith is able to triumph over this doubt. Doubt has a good go at unsettling the faithful person, attempting to convince her that "an expectancy without a specified time and place is nothing but a deception" (EUD 23/SKS 5, 32). And it is true that "the person who expects something particular can be deceived in his expectancy." But – Kierkegaard insists – "this does not happen to the believer" (EUD 23/SKS 5, 32). Genuine hope, open as it is to the future, cannot be disappointed.[10] Despite the challenges of life, the person of faith is able to say:

> There is an expectancy that the whole world cannot take from me; it is the expectancy of faith, and this is victory. I am not deceived, since I did not believe that the world would keep the promise it seemed to be making to me; my expectancy was not in the world but in God. This expectancy is not deceived; even now I sense its victory more gloriously and more joyfully than I sense all the pain of loss. (EUD 24/SKS 5, 32)

Consider this in light of the 1844 discourse in which Kierkegaard glosses being victorious as *God* being victorious (in line with the Lutheran idea of one's "centre of gravity" being transferred to God).[11] Is it not so with Abraham? *Pace* Hannay, I want to say that the Abraham of *Fear and Trembling* can say precisely this. What is crucial to the position Kierkegaard describes in this part of the discourse is the idea that *the only appropriate object of such faith is God*. He stresses that faith in human beings is always susceptible to disappointment (EUD 24/SKS 5, 33) – though as *Works of Love* goes on to insist, this is no excuse for cynicism

[10] Kierkegaard reaches the same point from a different angle in the *Works of Love* deliberation "Love hopes all things," with his claim that hoping for something for which it is shameful to hope amounts to not really hoping, as genuine hope "relates essentially and eternally to the good" (WL 261/SKS 9, 260–61). Wishing, craving, and merely temporal expecting (i.e., an expectancy which is not that of faith) can all be "put to shame" – but true hope cannot (WL 262/SKS 9, 261). It seems clear, therefore, that the hope described at the opening of *Repetition*, for instance – which is associated with youthfulness, cowardice, and superficiality, and which is described as "a beckoning fruit that does not satisfy" (R 132/SKS 4, 10) – is not genuine hope as Kierkegaard understands it. Perhaps this is another version of the hope that *Fear and Trembling* judges as paltry? Compare also the contrast between hoping and wishing in "An Occasional Discourse" (UDVS 100–1/SKS 8, 204–05). On openness to the future, see Gellman (2003), ch. 8.

[11] "One who prays aright struggles in prayer and is victorious – in that God is victorious," the last of the *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. On the "centre of gravity" point, see Hampson (2013), p. 22.

or mistrust. But God alone is our rock.[12] We now read words that, once again, Abraham might very well have said to himself during his trial:

> if you had faith in God, how then would your faith ever be changed into a beautiful fantasy you had better give up? Would he then be able to be changed, he in whom there is no change or shadow of variation? Would he not be faithful, he through whom every human being who is faithful is faithful; would he not be without guile, he through whom you yourself had faith? Would there ever be an explanation that could explain otherwise than that he is truthful and keeps his promises? (EUD 25/SKS 5, 33)

Abraham's hope is hope in the steadfast love of God. Kierkegaard then contrasts such a position with the "fair weather" faithful, for whom "When everything changes, when grief supersedes joy, then they fall away, then they lose faith, or, more correctly – let us not confuse the language – then they show that they have never had it" (EUD 25/SKS 5, 33–34).[13] Again, the claim is that, like hope, genuine faith cannot be disappointed.

So perhaps part of what is meant by *Fear and Trembling*'s repeated assertions that "Abraham did not doubt" and that "Abraham had faith" is that Abraham was graced the ability to resist the snares of this "crafty passion." What I want to stress is that one could hardly do so without *hope*. Importantly, Kierkegaard goes on to stress that such faith and its concomitant hope is compatible with grief and sorrow: he has the person of faith say that "the hard times can surely bring tears to my eyes and grief to my mind, but they still cannot rob me of my faith" (EUD 26/SKS 5, 34). Again *pace* Hannay, I cannot see why what Kierkegaard here says about grief and sorrow cannot be said of the "pathos-filled" Abrahamic *Angest* which Johannes stresses. Abraham's *Angest* is compatible with hope, which is a key weapon faith has against the dangers introduced by doubt.[14] But it is crucial to see that the hope at work here is not just a sunny optimism. Rather, I am suggesting – along with Paul in the epistle to the Romans – that to live in hope is not to be spared from "groaning" along with the rest of creation.[15]

[12] Thus I think Kierkegaard would view Clare Carlisle as fudging the issue somewhat when she describes the "courage that belongs to faith" as consisting in part in "accept[ing] the beloved back in the form of a gift – a gift from God, a gift from life, a gift from death, or a gift from love as it is incarnated in each living being" (Carlisle 2010, p. 195).

[13] On this point, compare the discussion of loss of hope at EUD 94–5/SKS 5, 100–01.

[14] Further light is shed on this by an 1850 journal entry in which Kierkegaard discusses how a person who lacks a *concrete impression* of God's love can nevertheless cling on to the *thought* that God is love, and that this is part of a "rigorous upbringing" in faith that will eventuate in a concrete God-relationship (CA Suppl. 172–73 (JP 2, 1401)/PAP X 2 A 493).

[15] Romans 8:22–27.

So: such hope is not mere wishing – it *expects* victory (construed as *God's* victory). For this reason, it differs from "everyday" hope in that – although it is compatible with *Angest* – it is claimed to be ultimately unshakable against the snares of doubt.[16]

But finally, we should note that the discourse "The expectancy of faith" goes on to outline two ways of *not* having faith. One is unsurprising: to expect absolutely nothing. But the other is both less obvious and more significant for our purposes: to expect *something particular* [*noget Enkelt*]. Kierkegaard claims: "not only the person who expects absolutely nothing does not have faith, but also the person who expects something particular or who bases his expectancy on something particular" (EUD 27/SKS 5, 35). Hence a key question: is Abraham's faith that he will "get Isaac back" about "something particular"? The discourse makes a claim that, at first glance, might seem to be in tension with *Fear and Trembling*: "The person of faith demands no substantiation of his expectancy"; he says that "it is not the case that the particular can substantiate or refute the expectancy of faith" (EUD 27/SKS 5, 35). Precisely what does this claim amount to, and is it in tension with the *Fear and Trembling* portrayal of faith? We shall return to this shortly.

Davenport on faith as eschatological trust

First, let me sketch an outline of the "eschatological trust" reading argued for by Davenport.[17] On this account, existential faith is "a type of eschatological hope. Eschatology in its most general sense refers to the final realization of the Good by divine power in this temporal order or its successor."[18] Compare this to the interpretation of "victory" in "The expectancy of faith": God is working all things together for good.

On the eschatological trust reading, "the *telos* toward which Abraham suspends his ethical duties to Isaac is the absurd possibility of Isaac's survival despite God's requirement that he be sacrificed."[19] What ultimately matters about the story is Abraham's trust in the "absurd" promise, based on this "eschatological hope."

[16] Though perhaps "everyday" hope sometimes has more resilience and greater flexibility than Kierkegaard here gives it credit for. One form of this flexibility is hope's ability to engender new constitutive hopes, as Luc Bovens puts it. For a discussion of this, see Lippitt (2013), pp. 136–55, especially pp. 152–54.

[17] Space limitations mean that it can be no more than a sketch. For the full picture, see Davenport (2008a) and (2008c).

[18] Davenport (2008c), p. 174 (cf. 2008a, p. 200).

[19] Davenport (2008c), p. 173.

The following key elements are involved:

1. An **ethical ideal** that must be recognized and willed; it is not rejected or transcended as a moral imperative. Abraham must continue to love Isaac "with his whole soul [*Sjæl*]."[20]
2. An **obstacle** thereto: "the human agent is prevented from achieving his or her moral ideal" by some circumstances "that make it practically impossible for the agent to secure it by his or her own powers."[21] God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.
3. **Infinite resignation**. Having concentrated his "entire identity in commitment to" the ethical ideal, the agent accepts that it is "humanly unattainable" because of the obstacle. So the agent either stops pursuing the ideal by his own endeavors (elegiac resignation) or continues out of principle, without any hope of success (Beowulfian resignation).[22] On Davenport's view, Abraham is resigned in the first sense,[23] and "he accepts that he cannot save Isaac if God demands him."[24]
4. An **eschatological promise** (requiring revelation rather than natural reason alone[25]) that the ideal "will be actualised by divine power within the created order of existence" within time.[26] God has promised Abraham that Isaac will become "the father of a holy nation to bring the Word to all peoples."[27]
5. **The absurd**: "the content of the eschatological promise, which is only eschatologically possible given the obstacle (and thus appears unintelligible outside of faith)."[28] The possibilities that, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, Isaac will not have to be sacrificed, or that, despite being sacrificed, he will survive to fulfill his promised destiny.[29]
6. **Existential faith**: defined in terms of 1–5: "the agent infinitely resigns [the ideal], yet trusting entirely in the eschatological promise, stakes his/her identity on the belief that [the ideal] will be actualized by

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 174, citing KW 6 (Walsh has "heart" for *Sjæl* [FT 74/SKS 4 165]). [21] *Ibid.*
[22] For more on these two types of resignation, see Davenport (2008a), pp. 228–29.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 229.
[24] Davenport (2008c), p. 174. There are elements of Davenport's discussion of infinite resignation that I might want to qualify, but this is beyond the scope of the present chapter.
[25] Davenport (2008a), p. 203.
[26] Davenport considers a second possibility ("either within time, or in the hereafter as a new temporal series (rather than as a Platonic *aeternitas*)" (2008c, p. 174), that need not concern us here.
[27] *Ibid.* [28] *Ibid.*
[29] In the summary of his position in his 2008c article, Davenport stresses only the second possibility (which is that apparently envisaged in Hebrews 11:19). But much of *Fear and Trembling* (and several of Davenport's comments thereon) are also compatible with the first.

> God."[30] Even at the point of willingness to sacrifice, Abraham believes that he will get Isaac back "by virtue of the absurd."[31]

In terms of hope specifically, this fits the thinking, in the "Tribute to Abraham," that "each becomes great in proportion to his expectation," such that "the one who expected the [humanly] impossible became greater than everybody" (FT 13/SKS 4, 113). Abraham is "great by that hope whose form is ["humanly" understood] madness [*Vanvid*]" (FT 14/SKS 4, 113).[32]

Let us consider two possible objections to such a reading: first, Johannes de silentio's statement that the story of Abraham is not about "the outcome," and second, that "getting Isaac back" sounds like "something particular" in the way criticized in "The expectancy of faith."

In his discussion of how "the single individual" assures himself that he is "justified" in standing "in an absolute relation to the absolute" (FT 54/SKS 4, 155), Johannes appears to criticize the view that "One judges it according to the outcome." This is what a "hero who has become an offense or stumbling block to his age" might cry to his contemporaries (though our age produces no heroes). However, Johannes warns:

> When someone in our age hears these words, "it will be judged according to the outcome," then it is clear right away with whom one has the honor of speaking. Those who talk this way are a numerous lot whom I shall designate by the common name of "associate professors." Secured in life, they live in their thoughts; they have a permanent position and secure prospects in a well-organised state . . . *Their task in life is to judge the great men and to judge them according to the outcome*. (FT 55/SKS 4, 155–56, final emphasis mine)

Is this a problem for the eschatological trust reading? When push comes to shove, is it not saying that Abraham is to be judged "according to the outcome"? After all, in a brief discussion of Jewish readings of the *Akedah*, Davenport explicitly sides with the view that it is about the "happy ending," rather than the original command, or both of these aspects.[33]

Too much can be made of the significance of Johannes' comments here. As Davenport notes, Brand Blanschard errs in this way when he asserts that "the fact that at the last moment [Abraham] was relieved of the need

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] To grasp his position in more detail, see especially Davenport's gloss on Tolkien's notion of eucatastrophe (2008a, pp. 203–05), and his summary of how the teleology at issue in *Fear and Trembling* differs from *telos* in Aristotle's sense (*ibid.*, pp. 214–15).

[32] Compare such hope to that specifically Christian hope which Kierkegaard describes, from the perspective of our natural understanding, as "lunacy [*Galskab*]" (FSE 83/SKS 13, 104).

[33] Davenport (2008a), pp. 198–99.

to strike is irrelevant [*sic*] in appraising him."[34] Few put it as bluntly as this, but several seem to work on a similar assumption, talking of "Abraham's sacrifice" as if the sacrifice had actually taken place.[35] In fact, I do not think that this passage is the problem for the eschatological trust reading that it might at first appear to be. For what Johannes is objecting to here about the "outcome" is merely sitting in judgment on "great men," and not applying anything learned about them, to our own lives. The passage quoted above continues:

> Such conduct towards the great betrays a curious mixture of arrogance and wretchedness – arrogance because they feel called to pass judgment, wretchedness because they do not feel their lives are even remotely related to those of the great. (FT 55/SKS 4, 156)[36]

There is thus a response available here to the eschatological trust reading. I take it that Davenport's focus on faith as eschatological trust as a means through which "the individual is singularized," coming as an "essentially particularistic attitude toward God as Thou," is precisely an attempt to avoid the disinterested judgmentalism Johannes condemns.[37] So what is it that we are to learn from Abraham? The short answer is: what it means to trust and hope.[38] My further suggestion is that Abraham serves as a precursor of the love that *Works of Love* describes as "believing all things" (a deliberation essentially about trust) and "hoping all things."[39] In the *Works of Love* deliberation "Love builds up," which precedes these deliberations on trust and hope, Kierkegaard famously argues that to love is to presuppose love in the one loved. If that is so, then for Abraham to love his God, he must presuppose God as loving. Imagine, then, a version of the discussion between mistrust and love (cf. WL 228/SKS 9, 230) applied to the *Akedah* case. Mistrust will say: "All is lost! God is a deceiver!" But love

[34] Blanchard (1969), p. 116, cited in Davenport (2008a), p. 213.

[35] See, for instance, Agacinski (1998), pp. 129–50, especially p. 139.

[36] Compare also Johannes' distaste at "flirting esthetically with the outcome": "no robber of churches who toils away in irons is so base a criminal as the one who plunders the holy in this way, and not even Judas . . . is more contemptible than the one who peddles greatness in this way" (FT 56/SKS 4, 156).

[37] Davenport (2008a), p. 217. "This singularising relation is existential faith: the absolute duty to love God singles us out because it includes a 'duty' to *have faith* in God as the ultimate person" (*ibid.*).

[38] As I have previously argued, the sub-Abrahams of "Tuning Up" demonstrate that mere obedience to God cannot be what makes Abraham exemplary (Lippitt 2003, pp. 22–29). On the theological importance of this emphasis on faith as trust as opposed to other possible emphases, see Levenson (2012), pp. 81–82.

[39] This seems consistent with Davenport's general treatment of existential faith as the broader category of which Christian faith is a sub-category (Davenport 2008a, p. 233).

will see God's apparent "badness," the "test," as mere "appearance" (WL 228/SKS 9, 230).[40] Love, we are told, knows all that experience knows – and yet trusts. If this loving trust is recommended for our relations to other people, how much more must it be so for our relation to God? It is the same with respect to hope. Kierkegaard puts these words into the mouth of the truly loving person: "Hope all things: give up on no human being, since to give up on him is to give up your love for him" (WL 255/SKS 9, 255). Again, if this is so of humans, how much more so of God? To give up on his trust and hope, then, would be for Abraham to give up his love for God.

We turn to the second objection. Is faith in "getting Isaac back" faith in "something particular" in a way judged illegitimate in "The expectancy of faith"? It certainly sounds like "something particular" in one sense. After all, God has made Abraham a specific promise. But compare the "tax collector" knight of faith whom Johannes imagines fantasizing about a sumptuous meal. He hopes against the available evidence ("he does not have four beans, and yet he firmly believes that his wife has that delectable dish for him" (FT 33/SKS 4, 134)), yet if he does not get this particular something, then "oddly enough – it is all the same to him" (FT 33/SKS 4, 134). Should we then extrapolate from this example? Is faith's hope a genuine trust in God in a more general sense, perhaps after the fashion of Julian of Norwich's "all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well"?[41]

To show why faith in "getting Isaac back" is not "something particular" in a problematic sense, I think Davenport's reading can usefully be supplemented by Jonathan Lear's discussion of "radical hope."[42]

[40] The companion discourse to "The expectancy of faith," "Every good and every perfect gift is from above," insists that the idea that God would tempt a person is a "terribly mistaken belief" (EUD 33/SKS 5, 42).

[41] This possibility is touched upon by Pattison and Jensen (2012), p. 9. Kierkegaard sometimes presents hoping "for this or for that" as "merely" temporal hope (CD Suppl. 373/PAP VIII 2 B 100: 2) and he seems ambivalent about the relation between "eternal" and "temporal" hope. In this passage (from the margin of a draft), they are presented as at war, but elsewhere it is noted that they grew up and played together in childhood as peers (UDVS 113/SKS 8, 215), while in his 1848 notes toward a never completed follow-up to *The Sickness Unto Death*, abandoning "hope *for this life*" and "the hope *of eternity*" are *both* among the dangers to be counselled against (SUD Suppl. 165 (JP 6, 6280)/PAP IX A 500).

[42] Lear (2006). The only other attempt I know of in the secondary literature to bring *Fear and Trembling* into dialogue with Lear on radical hope is toward the end of Carlisle's book. However, the primary focus of Carlisle's discussion is the link between faith and courage, whereas I want to explore the link between the two texts specifically through a more detailed exploration of what Lear means by "radical hope."

Radical hope

Lear's *Radical Hope* discusses the fate of the Native American Crow Nation, and the reaction of their last great chief, Plenty Coups (or Many Achievements), to the collapse of their traditional way of life. But Lear is interested in extrapolating from this discussion some more general lessons about radical changes in a people's future. I want to argue that the "radical hope" that Plenty Coups' attitude embodies, on Lear's account, contains some important lessons for understanding Abraham as an exemplar of existential faith. If, as I think is the case, Abraham's hope is "radical" in Lear's sense, this dispels the worry that Abraham's faith manifests "something particular" in the sense Kierkegaard is troubled by in "The expectancy of faith."

I will first outline Lear's account of Plenty Coups' likely reasoning. We shall then see how this can be applied to Abraham's case, and the way in which this illustrates existential faith.

Plenty Coups had to face up to the potential collapse of life as he knew it, in which changed circumstances threaten to render meaningless the shared conception of what it is to live an excellent Crow life (in terms of its norms, values, ceremonial customs, established social roles, etc.). Yet Lear speculates that his reaction would make sense if we suppose him reasoning as follows. He recognizes that there is much about the future that we do not understand. Yet he considers himself to have a hopeful message (in his case from a dream vision) that purports to come from a divine source – and he further considers this to be "something to hold on to in the face of overwhelming challenge."[43] (A key part of the dream is to learn from the chickadee, "least in strength but strongest of mind of his kind," who learns by listening, and from whom Plenty Coups takes the message that "It is the mind that leads a man to power, not strength of body."[44])

To survive and possibly once again to flourish, the Crow needed to be willing to give up almost everything they had understood about what constituted the good life: "not a choice that could be reasoned about in the pre-existing terms of the good life. One needed some conception of – or commitment to – a goodness that transcended one's current understanding of the good."[45] (Here Lear makes an explicit, if passing, reference to the "teleological suspension of the ethical.") Lear reads Plenty Coups as "someone who experienced himself as receiving a divine call to tolerate the

[43] Lear (2006), p. 91. [44] *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71. [45] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

collapse of ethical life. This would include even a collapse of the concepts with which ethical life had hitherto been understood."[46]

(Note that it is this which makes such hope "radical." It is not simply that Plenty Coups hopes for a future that is not entirely within his own control. While the latter might be argued to be a feature of most "mature" hope, most such hope does *not* require us to abandon and then rebuild concepts such as the good with which we aim to orient ourselves in the world.[47])

Lear then sets out a detailed account of what might plausibly have been Plenty Coups' reasoning.[48] I focus here on key aspects of this that in important respects parallel the Abraham case:

1. A divine source tells us that an accepted way of life is coming to an end.
2. Our conception of the good is tied up with that way of life – precisely the way of life that is about to disappear.

Thus:

3. "in an important sense we do not know what to hope for or what to aim for. Things are going to change in ways beyond which we can currently imagine."[49]

Still,

4. "*There is more to hope for than mere biological survival* . . . If I am going to go on living, I need to be able to see a genuine, positive and honourable way of going forward. So, on the one hand, I need to recognize the discontinuity that is upon me – like it or not there will be a radical shift in form of life. On the other, I need to preserve some integrity across that discontinuity."[50]

However, there are grounds for hope because:

5. "God . . . is good. My commitment to the genuine transcendence of God is manifest in my commitment to the goodness of the world transcending our necessarily limited attempt to understand it. My commitment to God's transcendence and goodness is manifested in my commitment to the idea that *something good will emerge even if it outstrips my present limited capacity for understanding what that good is*."[51]

[46] *Ibid.* [47] I am grateful to Dan Conway for pressing me to clarify this point.
[48] Lear (2006), pp. 92–94. [49] *Ibid.*, p. 93. [50] *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94, my emphasis.
[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 94, my emphasis.

6. "I am thus committed to the idea that while we Crow must abandon the goods associated with our way of life – and thus we must abandon the conception of the good life that our tribe has worked out over centuries.[52] *We shall get the good back*, though at the moment we can have no more than a glimmer of what that might mean."[53]

My suggestion is that *mutatis mutandis*, this general schema seems to apply also to Abraham qua exemplar of existential faith. Regarding points 1 and 2: with the *Akedah* command, something radical has changed in Abraham's understanding of God's covenant and thus what the future holds. Consequently, we can imagine Abraham reasoning as in point 3. It is in this sense that Abraham's situation is beyond all "human calculation" (FT 30/SKS 4, 131). Perhaps such reasoning is what lies behind his ambiguous "final word" ("God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son!" (FT 102/SKS 4, 203, citing Genesis 22: 8)). Point 4 does not map on precisely, but is relevant in the sense that more is at stake than the mere biological survival of Isaac, as the second to fourth sub-Abrahams of "Tuning Up" illustrate. Isaac survives in all three stories, but none illustrate faith, since in the second case, Abraham "saw joy no more" (FT 9/SKS 4, 109) as a result of his ordeal; in the third, he blames himself for violating his duty to his son, considering himself to be beyond forgiveness; and in the fourth, Abraham draws his knife in despair and Isaac loses his faith (FT 10–11/SKS 4, 111).

Point 5 seems a good description of the possible thinking behind Abraham's despair-resisting hope. It is this – especially the italicized passage – that enables Abraham to say, with a flexibility that looks the very opposite of "something particular," "Surely it will not happen, or if it does, the Lord will give me a new Isaac, namely by virtue of the absurd" (FT 101/SKS 4, 203). This is indeed a statement of "radical hope" in Lear's sense. And point 6 is akin to the notion of "getting Isaac back," which Davenport describes as "an eschatological possibility in which we can only have faith."[54] I think the overall line for which I am arguing here is consistent with that of C. Stephen Evans, for whom Abraham's trust in God amounts to a confidence that "God will keep his promises" – without knowing *how*.[55]

[52] A form of infinite resignation? [53] Lear (2006), p. 94. [54] Davenport (2008a), p. 220.

[55] See Evans' "Introduction" to FT, xviii. Note that such a reading does not commit us to the idea that Abraham holds contradictory beliefs (that he both will and will not sacrifice Isaac) – an interpretation that I was also at pains to avoid in earlier work (see Lippitt 2003, especially pp. 66–76). Nor does it present Abraham as having sussed God's real intentions and called his

Lear concludes that Plenty Coups' hope was a remarkable achievement in no small part because it managed to enable him to avoid despair.[56] Likewise, we can add, Abraham. But, as we stressed earlier, what makes the hope radical "is that it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is."[57] Thus, Lear concludes, "hope becomes crucial for an ethical enquiry into life at the horizons of one's understanding."[58]

Now, if Abraham's hope is "radical" in something like Lear's sense, then this enables us to see that hoping to "get Isaac back" is not "something particular" in the sense condemned in "The expectancy of faith." Lear discusses the way in which Plenty Coups was able to give his people

> a basis for hope at a time when it was systematically unclear what one could hope for. Plenty Coups' dream held out for the Crow the hope that if they followed the wisdom of the chickadee (whatever that would come to mean) they would survive (whatever that would come to mean) and hold on to their lands (whatever that would come to mean).[59]

Similarly, I suggest, Abraham's faith in God enables him to believe that all will be for the good (whatever that would come to mean) and that he will get Isaac back in this life (whatever that would come to mean). In this way, his faith is not in "something particular" in the problematic sense.

Moreover, there is nothing particularly quirky about such a view of hope. John Macquarrie makes a similar point about both hope in the Old Testament and Christian hope. Discussing Abraham in particular, Macquarrie remarks that human promises tend to be "sufficiently specific" to know whether or not they have been kept. However, he adds,

> no such simple criteria seem to operate when we are thinking of the promises of God. His basic promise is to give us more abundant life. But we cannot specify the conditions of such a life in advance. It is only in the unfolding of history and the actual deepening of human life that we can say whether the promise is being fulfilled. This could well mean that it is fulfilled differently from the way we had at one time expected, for our expectation could be framed only in terms of what we had experienced up

bluff. Rather, as Evans puts it, "Abraham simply rests unwaveringly in his trust in God's goodness; he believes that God will keep his promises, *even though he does not know exactly how God will do this*, and realizes that from the perspective of human experience, it looks impossible" (Evans, "Introduction" in FT, xix, my emphasis). What I am suggesting is that drawing on Lear can enable us to gloss the italicized phrase – and also to show that Abraham's hope is more radical than this way of putting it may at first make it appear.

[56] Lear (2006), p. 100. [57] *Ibid.*, p. 103. [58] *Ibid.*, p. 105. [59] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

> to that point, whereas the fulfilling of the promise might bring with it something new.[60]

Finally for this section, I will return briefly to "Love hopes all things" further to suggest how hope there seems to work at the same level of generality as the eschatological trust reading. Love, we are told, takes upon itself the work of hope (WL 248/SKS 9, 248); hope is nothing without love (WL 259/SKS 9, 258). To "hope all things" is the "eternal" register of what is expressed temporally by talking of hoping "always" (WL 249/SKS 9, 249). But the help of the eternal is further equated with the help of the possibility of the good (WL 250/SKS 9, 249–50) – expressed at precisely the same level of generality as we drew on Davenport and Lear to describe.[61] Anything that does not deal with the eternal – that is, the possibility of good – is not genuine hope (WL 251/SKS 9, 251), and – expressed temporally – "the whole of one's life should be the time of hope" (WL 252/SKS 9, 251).[62] This is what Abraham embodies insofar as he does not fall into the snares of doubt.

Existential faith "in the world"

Finally, I want briefly to suggest some connections between Abraham's hope and both courage and humility, to try to shed some light on Abraham's "paradoxical and humble courage" (FT 41/SKS 4, 143).

Hope's link with courage. For Lear, radical hope plays a crucial role in a courageous life. But in line with what we have so far said, the Crow conception of courage had to change. Hence Lear's suggestion is of more general interest for our purposes:

> Might there be a certain plasticity deeply embedded in a culture's thick conception of courage? That is, are there ways in which a person brought up in a culture's traditional understanding of courage might draw upon his own inner resources to broaden his understanding of what courage might be? In such a case, one would begin with a culture's thick understanding of courage; but one would somehow find ways to thin it out: find ways to

[60] Macquarrie (1978), p. 53. For more detail on how this might be seen as operating in the case of the *Akedah*, see Levenson (2012), pp. 84–85.

[61] One can see something of the "infinite frailty" (WL 251/SKS 9, 251) of possibility that Kierkegaard talks about here by trying to imagine oneself in Abraham's situation. The dialogue between hope and despair (WL 254/SKS 9, 253–54) is also worth reading with the *Akedah* in mind. Perhaps the fourth sub-Abraham – and also the second? – has listened too much to despair.

[62] This is also illustrated in the case of the prophet Anna, discussed at length in the discourse "Patience in expectancy."

> face circumstances courageously that the older thick conception never envisaged.[63]

So it is, I suggest, with the hope Abraham manifests as part of his faith. That is, he finds ways to hope that go beyond his original understanding of God's promise. Abraham starts with a relatively clear idea of what God has promised him through Isaac. But his "trial" challenges this expectation. One way of thinking about Abraham's situation is that he is faced with the following dilemma. Does he give up this hope (perhaps in the manner of some of the sub-Abrahams)? Or does he maintain his faith in God in a manner to which radical hope – as summarized above: a hope that transcends his understanding – is central? The fact that Abraham responds in the latter way is a key part of why Johannes presents him as exemplary of existential faith.

The connection with courage can best be approached by considering why we consider courage as a virtue. Lear's answer is because it is an excellent way of responding to the fact that we are finite erotic creatures: "we reach out to the world in yearning, longing, admiration, and desire for that which (however mistakenly) we take to be valuable, beautiful and good."[64] As such, "we take risks just by being in the world."[65] And here we should note what it means to inhabit a world:

> a world is not merely the environment in which we move about; it is that over which we lack omnipotent control, that about which we may be mistaken in significant ways, that which may intrude upon us, that which may outstrip the concepts with which we seek to understand it. Thus living within a world has inherent and unavoidable risk.[66]

Surely this is something that Abraham learns, and as Johannes Climacus famously reminds us, without risk, no faith. Yet Kierkegaard's more positive spin on this is to say that "in reliance on God, one dares to venture everything" (EUD 369/SKS 5, 354). The relevance of all this to courage is that in its thinnest sense, Lear suggests, courage is "the capacity for living *well* with the risks that inevitably attend human existence."[67]

It is vital to stress that these risks are inextricably bound up with our finitude, and that this in turn impacts on a conception of the good life for creatures like us. In other words, goodness "transcends our finite powers to grasp it."[68] Indeed, "it seems oddly inappropriate – lacking in understanding of oneself as a finite creature – to think that what is good

[63] Lear (2006), p. 65. [64] *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20. [65] *Ibid.*, p. 120. [66] *Ibid.* [67] *Ibid.*, p. 121. [68] *Ibid.*

about the world is exhausted by our current understanding of it."[69] Recognition of this finitude and God-dependence – and embodying radical hope in the face of this recognition – is again a significant part of why Johannes presents Abraham as exemplary.[70]

Hope's link with humility. So why is Abraham's courage "humble"? A full answer is beyond the scope of this chapter, but let me offer a provisional sketch. One preliminary answer might be that the link between courage and humility is what you would expect, given that in the discourse "Against cowardliness," Kierkegaard equates cowardliness with pride: "cowardliness and pride are one and the same" (EUD 354/SKS 5, 341). In this discourse, the proud person is presented as one who is struggling with God and wanting to do this under his own power (EUD 354/SKS 5, 341). But there is a falsity about this, since such a person needs the support of others. God, says Kierkegaard, will expose his solitariness as a mirage, and this he cannot stand (EUD 355/SKS 5, 342). But Abraham, by contrast, is for Johannes both *genuinely* solitary[71] in his trial (unlike the "tragic hero") *and* recognizes his absolute dependence upon God. However, here too a further parallel between Abraham and Plenty Coups might help. In Plenty Coups' courage, "There is no implication that one can glimpse what lies beyond the horizons of one's historically situated understanding. There is no claim to grasp ineffable truths. Indeed, this form of commitment is impressive in part because it acknowledges that no such grasp is possible."[72] Yet both Plenty Coups and Abraham commit "to a goodness that transcends his understanding."[73] This is "a peculiar form of hopefulness . . . the hope for *revival*: for coming back to life in a form that is not yet intelligible."[74] This is a form of commitment far more akin to humility than arrogance – especially when combined with the dependence on God stressed above. And this is a point worth noting in a world which,

[69] *Ibid*., p. 122.

[70] The "courage of faith," specifically, is presented in the discourse "Against cowardliness" as being a recognition of one's total reliance upon God, in language that recalls *Fear and Trembling*'s references to "knights" of faith: "no one should fear to entrust himself to God with the idea that this relationship would deprive him of his power and make him cowardly. It is just the reverse. Anyone upon whom God does not confer knighthood with his powerful hand is and remains cowardly in his deepest soul" (EUD 352–53/SKS 5, 340). (I am grateful to Adam Pelser for this point.) As Daphne Hampson notes, however, this dependence is not just a Schleiermacherean resting in another, since for Kierkegaard the self must also relate to itself self-reflexively; choose to be itself (Hampson 2013, pp. 230, 245).

[71] Hence the emphasis on his "silence."

[72] Lear (2006), p. 95. (Compare here Kierkegaard's 1850 journal remark that "the concept of the absurd is precisely to grasp the fact that it cannot and must not be grasped" (JP 1, 7/PAP X 2 A 354).)

[73] Lear (2006), p. 95. [74] *Ibid.*

as Lear notes, often thinks that "religious commitment breeds arrogant intolerance – as though the believers had a 'direct line to God'."[75] (In my experience of teaching it, this is one of the most common undergraduate reactions to *Fear and Trembling*.) In other words, what might appear as Abraham's arrogance – standing as a single individual above the universal; heading for Moriah without discussing the matter with Sarah – can be viewed differently if one sees this through the lens of his humility before God, and his openness and willingness to turn the whole situation over to God in faith, trust, and hope.[76]

Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that, read against the background of the discourse "The expectancy of faith," one can find much support for a version of the "faith as eschatological trust" reading of *Fear and Trembling* that Davenport has developed out of earlier interpretations. Two likely objections to that position – those about "the outcome" and about "something particular" – can be resisted. I have also stressed the advantages of understanding how Abraham's hope is "radical" in something like Lear's sense, a focus that also throws some light on why Johannes claims that Abraham manifests a "humble courage." The significance of Abraham's hope deserves more attention than it has typically been given, not least because Abraham serves as a striking illustration of Kierkegaard's claim that so long as there is a task, there is hope (UDVS 276–77/SKS 8, 371–72).

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] On this point, compare Carlisle's suggestions about the "open-hearted" and "feminine" aspects of the courage of faith (Carlisle 2010, pp. 198–99).

CHAPTER 8

On being moved and hearing voices: passion and religious experience in Fear and Trembling

Rick Anthony Furtak

Prophecy, Philosophy, and Truth

The book of Ezekiel begins by recounting a colorful vision of divinity, such as the prophet claims to have seen. According to Maimonides, however, this does not refer "to the eye's seeing" but to "intellectual apprehension,"[1] of the same kind that any of us might use in solving a mathematical problem. Assuming that a genuine prophetic insight could only be an insight into abstract rational truth, Maimonides asserts that this is what Ezekiel must have "beheld," so to speak. Clearly, the great medieval thinker would agree with William James that "some states of mind are inwardly superior to others, and reveal to us more truth."[2] However, on his view, it is *only* through our rational faculty that we comprehend any truths that are worthy of the name. This way of thinking leads Maimonides to conclude that the biblical narrative of Abraham and Isaac is meant to convey "rational ideas" such as those found in the writings of the Greek philosophers.[3] So he argues that Abraham ought to be understood as a vessel of philosophical wisdom,[4] whose "prophetic" insights are epistemically on par with whatever else is "apprehended through . . . the intellect."[5] On his view, what it means to be an inspired prophet is to be blessed with abstract knowledge. And Maimonides is adamant that the rational faculty which gives us access to truth is pure of any emotion or passion. At the moment of hearing God's word, he explains, Abraham was *not* "in a state of passion" by any means,[6] but employing his capacity for cold, unemotional thought.

[1] Maimonides (1963), 1.4, pp. 27–28. [2] James (1990), p. 22. [3] Boehm (2007), p. 74.
[4] Maimonides (1963), 2.45, pp. 402–03.
[5] Maimonides (1963), 3.24, as cited by Boehm (2007), pp. 82–83. On the type of "scientific knowledge" which pertains to what cannot be otherwise, see Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 71b. Also relevant to Maimonides' account is the discussion of the "active intellect": Aristotle, *De Anima* 430a.
[6] Maimonides (1963), 3.24, pp. 501–02. A more comprehensive reading of Maimonides might reveal a subtler view of passion than we are led to expect when we read that "all passions are evil" (*ibid.*, 1.54), but his outlook on most passions is hardly favorable. On this topic, see Benor (1996), pp. 46–53.

When we compare this hyper-rationalistic position with the account of Abraham that we find in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous *Fear and Trembling*, one striking contrast is the way that *passion* is emphasized in the latter text. Abraham's faith is described as a "supreme passion" (FT 19/SKS 4, 119) and a "gigantic passion" (FT 26/SKS 4, 128) – and Abraham is taken to illustrate the kind of faith that "is the highest passion in a human being" (FT 108/SKS 4, 209).[7] The "knight of faith," a defining exemplar of what it means to believe (who is sometimes identified with Abraham) is distinguished by his great capacity for passion (FT 35n, 68–69/SKS 4, 137, 169–70) and by his ability to love (FT 39–42, 65/SKS 4, 141–44). Indeed, one *needs* passion in order to become a knight of faith (FT 43/SKS 4, 144). Elsewhere in *Fear and Trembling*, passion is said to be "that which unites all [of] human life" (FT 59/SKS 4, 159). The person who has "infinite passion" is praised (FT 97/SKS 4, 199), and "passionate" is used unmistakably as a term of approval (FT 64/SKS 4, 165). Here, passion is conceived as a power that *can* be trusted – but why?

False assumptions about the irrationality of passion

One well-worn answer to that question goes something like this: the "passion of faith" that is positively valenced in *Fear and Trembling* is a mental faculty "wholly cut off from reason,"[8] and the fact that passion is celebrated in this text is sufficient proof of its irrationalism. We are also told that, because Kierkegaard is a proponent of "faith alone, and not reason," he advises us to be guided by "not an intellectual, but an emotional" power.[9] Or, that the "blind fanaticism" Abraham represents could only be glorified by an author who has a "passionate disregard for objectivity,"[10] or a hatred for the truth. The "militant irrationalism" of *Fear and Trembling* is said to demonstrate that Kierkegaard "puts reason aside" and opts for "passion" instead.[11] The authors of these opinions include prominent scholars, editors of leading introductory texts and bestselling anthologies, so it is not surprising to hear others echoing the same bias. We read that "Kierkegaard's passion" is "an irrational and dangerous impulse," requiring the "suspension of reason" altogether.[12]

[7] All citations from the text of *Fear and Trembling* refer to *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[8] Pojman (2008), pp. 119–20. Pojman has edited a number of highly visible philosophical anthologies.
[9] Warnock (1996), p. 9. [10] Kaufmann (1980), pp. 177–79, 194.
[11] Bykhovskii (1976), pp. 53–55. [12] Weddle (2010), pp. 172–73.

Or that, if we accept that faith is an "emotional state," then we have endorsed an "irrationalist" interpretation of *Fear and Trembling*.[13] All of these statements share a tacit premise; namely, that passions or emotions are simply irrational.

If it were true that passions are entirely irrational, then Maimonides would be right to banish them from the true prophet's reasonable mind, and Kierkegaard could only be a crazy irrationalist. But what if we look at *Fear and Trembling* on its own terms? Does "Johannes de Silentio," Kierkegaard's pseudonym, share the assumption that passion, or emotion, is opposed to reason? Walter Kaufmann, perhaps the most influential of the authors and editors whose words I quoted above, brings up the very passage that offers a strong hint about how passion is understood in *Fear and Trembling* – and then he utterly misses the hint. As proof that Kierkegaard is "mistaken" and in "error," Kaufmann mistakenly attributes to Kierkegaard himself this statement: "The conclusions of passion are the only trustworthy [or, 'reliable'] ones" (FT 87/SKS 4, 189). After that, he erroneously reads this claim as upholding a blatantly irrational position:

> Reason alone, to be sure, cannot solve some of life's most central problems. Does it follow that passion *can*, or that reason ought to be abandoned altogether?[14]

If we pause for a moment on the passage in question, we may find ourselves wondering how *passion*, if it wholly excludes *reason*, can nonetheless form *conclusions* which are more or less *reliable* or *trustworthy* [*paalidelige*]. For Kierkegaard's pseudonymous text plainly indicates that passion is capable of arriving at a conclusion – that is, a reasonable judgment. It assigns an epistemic truth value to passion, and attributes to passion the function of forming beliefs. As we will see, this alternative way of understanding the passions is crucial to the logic of *Fear and Trembling*.

Emotion and reason in Kierkegaard's writings

The presumption that passions are irrational shows up in renowned books on religion, such as Otto's *Das Heilige*, but it has been challenged more recently. Otto may be correct in imagining that Abraham experienced

[13] Gill (1981), p. 213.

[14] Kaufmann (1975), p. 18. On the vast readership of this volume, and Kaufmann's attitude toward Kierkegaard, see Pickus (2010), pp. 17–31.

"something 'numinous'," yet he deprives this experience of intelligible meaning when he claims that our "religious feelings" or "emotions" are the "non-rational factor" in religious experience, and are not susceptible to "*conceptual* explanation."[15] Contrary to this way of thinking, Wayne Proudfoot argues against theories of religion which "assume that emotions and feelings are independent of concepts or thoughts."[16] Such theories embody the same assumption that has been identified above. Why is it false? If emotions – or passions[17] – were only *sensations* rather than *perceptions*, they would not command the same attention that they do. As opposed to itches or cramps, emotions are associated with our most important values and goals, and with our sense of what matters. Being passionately moved is a way of responding to some aspect of the world that we care about: when we get angry or when we grieve, we feel angry *at* someone or grief *about* something. Likewise, "one could not experience the passion (emotion) of anger if one did not judge oneself to be slighted unjustifiedly . . . nor could one experience fear if one did not judge that danger was impending."[18]

This is why Kierkegaard claims that "only great souls are prone to passions" and praises the character trait of "vulnerability toward emotion":[19] it is because emotions or passions are world-oriented or intentional phenomena, which involve specific ways of perceiving or construing matters that we take to be significant.[20] Due to their orientation toward truth, passions aim at getting things right, and they are susceptible to getting things wrong for the same reason. Grief has to do with *what is the case*, namely that a dearly beloved person has died and that this is a profound loss. Anger also is related to what has actually happened in my world of concern, and it is inappropriate if it is based upon a false conception of what has occurred (for instance, if I get angry at someone for a theft he did not commit).[21] This is why there is a whole vocabulary of terms that we apply to emotions, which cannot be assigned to cramps and

[15] Otto (1958), pp. 8–11. Emphasis in original. [16] Proudfoot (1985), pp. 78–79.

[17] I am using "emotion" and "passion" as near-synonyms, in keeping with ordinary usage. This is also consistent with Kierkegaard's use: see, for example, PAP X 4 A 614. Either "emotion" or "passion" can, in standard usage, denote affective responses that may be brief or long-standing: the emotion of surprise, or the passion of wonder. Kierkegaard associates the ancient Greek term for the passions with the Danish *Lidenskaberne* (see PAP IV C 57). Whether he is using this word for passions or emotions, or the kindred term *Følelserne* ("emotions" or "feelings"), he routinely demonstrates an appreciation of the cognitive nature of emotions.

[18] Ferreira (1991), p. 24. [19] Quoting from PAP II A 755 and PAP IV A 44.

[20] On intentionality (or "directedness") as the characteristic trait of emotions and other mental phenomena, see Brentano (1996), pp. 87–91.

[21] Cf. Solomon (1993), pp. 100–01, 111–19.

itches: passions and emotions can be described as sensible or foolish, warranted or untruthful, and so on. The reason why it makes sense to speak of "passionately acknowledging" a state of affairs (see FT 40/SKS 4, 141)[22] is that we apprehend or grasp the meaning of situations through our affective responses.

This idea, that passions are *somehow* rational or cognitive, is often misunderstood. It does not rest upon a denial of the fact that, for instance, to be disappointed is to *feel* a certain way. It only adds the further observation that, in order to be disappointed in you, I must feel that you have somehow let me down. And to *feel that* this is the case, and that it is significantly bad as far as I am concerned, is to have a precisely specified mental attitude. In feeling this emotion, I could be mistaken in any number of ways: my expectations may have been outrageous, or my beliefs about what you have done or failed to do might be wildly inaccurate. Nevertheless, the point is that when we describe an emotion or a passion as irrational, what we are pointing to is a failure to attain a standard of reasonableness in this particular case, *not* a general property that all passions have in common. Emotions can be more or less accurate, as justified fear would be. Becoming afraid in the face of a genuine threat that I recognize as such is neither a non-rational state of mind nor an anti-rational one.[23] On the contrary, it is through fear that one has access to an apparent threat. To feel that there is nothing to fear, therefore, is to have the world *seem* free of danger; and a feeling of dependence could not be identified as such without the sense *that one is dependent*. It would be pointless "to speak of certain emotions in the absence of appropriate objects," as for instance if a person were to profess that he was "ashamed of the rain," or terrified that something good might happen.[24] When "Johannes de Silentio" tells us that he is not afraid of prompting many readers to emulate Abraham (FT 46/SKS 4, 146–47), it is because he regards this bad prospect as extremely unlikely to happen: he *would* fear it, though, if he regarded it as an imminent danger.

Our emotions and passions reveal what is significant to us, what we value or care about, which "might not be epistemically accessible to us if we did not have such responses."[25] If this is basically correct, then

[22] KW 6, 47.

[23] See, for example, Nussbaum (2001), p. 356. She distinguishes between these two senses in which emotions might be called "irrational." For instance, according to classical Stoicism, passions were not *other* than reason but they were *against* reason, as a mode of false belief. See also Furtak (2005), p. 5.

[24] Proudfoot (1985), pp. 87–88.

[25] Goldie (2000), pp. 48–49.

emotions are a crucial mode of cognition, which cannot be identified with dispassionate rationality. It is in being moved with a sense of grief that we become aware of how much a person who has died meant to us. For Kierkegaard, "the more grief at the loss of the particular, the more its reality and value in one's life."[26] This shows how our emotions reveal to us what is most significant, and why it would be an epistemic and moral shortcoming to lack emotional responsiveness. Yet Kierkegaard's attitude toward passion is not one of indiscriminate and comprehensive approval. He takes issue with "spurious emotionality,"[27] and writes: "Let no one misunderstand all my talk about pathos and passion to mean [that I have the intention] to give my blessing to . . . every unshaven passion."[28] In *Fear and Trembling*, where the terms "emotion" and "passion" signify something good in most instances of their use from the Preface (FT 3/SKS 4, 101) to the Epilogue (FT 108/SKS 4, 209), there are still some conspicuous exceptions – such as the following lines from "A Tribute to Abraham":

> [I]f underlying everything there were only a wild, fermenting force writhing in dark passions that produced everything . . . what would life be then but despair? (FT 12/SKS 4, 112)

We can affirm meaning in life over the possibility of underlying meaninglessness only if we are open to perceiving value in the world by way of our affective responses. One might say that the vision of reality we are left with if we leave subjectivity out of the picture is at least as terrifying as the darkest passions.

Affective rationality and its limits

In summary, then: Kierkegaard recognizes that some emotions can be unreliable *without* rejecting all emotions as irrational or false. Rather, he maintains that passion and emotion are capable of aiming toward truth. In his writings, we find a near-echo of Aristotle's claim that it would be wrong not to fear what *is* fearful,[29] and his opposition to sentimentality aims to bring false emotion into contrast with "true and genuine feeling,"[30]

[26] Hall (1999), p. 71. Cf. Carlisle (2005), p. 99: "Passion can signify both love and suffering . . . [T]he intensity of Abraham's pain as he raises his knife over Isaac's body corresponds to the intensity of his love for his son."

[27] This is from an 1846 journal entry: PAP VII 1 A 161, Hong translation.

[28] From an 1844 journal entry: PAP V A 44, Hannay translation.

[29] From UDVS 45–46. Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1382a–1383a. On the way that Aristotle conceptualizes "the broader category of *pathos* (passion or emotion)," see Cooper (1999), pp. 257, 406–23.

[30] See PAP I A 117.

attempting to define what the latter would be. The bias that we heard a number of commentators expressing above is interrogated in this epigraph: "Is reason then alone baptized,/are the passions pagans?" The passage, adapted from *Night Thoughts* by Edward Young,[31] stands at the beginning of Kierkegaard's authorship. And it asks: why couldn't passion be potentially as truthful as dispassionate rationality? *Fear and Trembling* continues with this theme: "the conclusions of passion are the only trustworthy ones, i.e., the only convincing ones" (FT 87/SKS 4, 189). This pseudonymous work is filled with examples of joy, grief, delight, sorrow, awe, pride, wonder, and love.

Each of these emotions could be more or less appropriate in a given case – that is, they are susceptible to being veridical or groundless. Furthermore, it is made clear in Kierkegaard's personal writings *and* his pseudonymous works that every understanding has its mood, or that a certain mood is requisite for a certain understanding.[32] A tranquil state, for instance, arguably prohibits one from comprehending the notion of guilt. Far from being an irrationalist about the passions, Kierkegaard has accurately been described as a thinker for whom "emotion and belief are closely intertwined," and who has the "larger purpose of providing an account of human moods and emotions."[33] Recognizing the difference between affective dispositions and episodic emotions, Kierkegaard employs the word "passion" in distinct ways to refer to each of these: on the one hand, the dispositional concern that we identify by stating that we "have a passion" for something, and, on the other hand, our subsequent "passions" felt in response to one or another state of affairs, based upon this underlying concern.[34] In other words, it is our dispositions of love, care, or interest that dispose us toward being moved. Imagining a bookstore owner with a *passion for* her store, Roberts explains how this disposes her toward having *passions about* the bookshop:

> If [the shop] is not quite thriving but she notes signs of its beginning to do so, she will be hopeful. If business is going badly and she is aware of the prospect of having to close the shop, she will be anxious . . . [In this way,]

[31] In English, Young's words (4.629–30) are: "Are *Passions*, then, the Pagans of the Soul?/*Reason* alone baptiz'd?" Emphasis in original. See KW 4, 1.

[32] Undated journal entry from 1846: PAP VII 1 A 192. See also KW 8.

[33] Gouwens (1996), pp. 52, 77–84.

[34] The Danish *Lidenskab* is used in each of these two senses in Kierkegaard's work – for illustrations of each type of use, see Furtak (2005), p. 45, n. 156. On this distinction see also Nussbaum (2001), pp. 69–76.

> virtually any concern (passion, interest, enthusiasm, attachment, involvement) can give rise to any or all of the whole range of emotions.[35]

Long-standing affective dispositions define the background out of which particular emotional or passionate episodes arise: as soon as one has formed such a disposition, one is vulnerable to emotional responses of every kind.

However, this is where we encounter something other than *cognition-based passions* – that is, in the "concern (passion, interest, enthusiasm, attachment, involvement)" that can give rise to many different emotions. These affective dispositions could also be called *passionately based convictions*. Here is Kierkegaard's explanation of why a passionate conviction is *more* than one can entirely justify:

> If I truly have a conviction ... [then] my conviction to me is always stronger than reasons; actually, conviction is what *supports* the reasons, not the other way around ... When I have passion, reasons swell to monstrous dimensions.[36]

Shortly after this, he compares a passionate conviction to the feeling of utter assurance that a wholehearted lover has *about* his love. Forming an attachment or enthusiasm, beginning to love or to care, is a basic movement of the heart: it does not require justification, since it is that which justifies. If the one who has come to faith *has his life in* this passion (FT 109/SKS 4, 210), this is because it gives a meaningful frame of reference. These affective dispositions, these passionate convictions, are *more* than we could explain by appealing to the objective merit of our beloved, for instance, or our life's passion. Although in one sense *this* person, or *this* pursuit, is not the only one worthy of being loved, or being the object of sustained concern, what matters is that the person or the pursuit *is* worthy and is the one that *we* are passionate about. In the "bookshop" example above, a passion for the bookshop grounds particular emotions about it – and this shows how the more basic disposition or conviction can ground or justify other affective responses.[37] Without a concern for the bookshop, she would not be pleased when it is doing well or worried when its prospects look dim. These emotions are intelligible in terms of her background commitment or conviction, which *is* a passionate concern.

[35] Roberts (1998), pp. 185–86. Cf. Evans (2009), p. 184.
[36] Journal entry from 1849, PAP X 1 A 481.
[37] Cf. Furtak (2005), pp. 8–10, 45–46. Also relevant here is James (1990), pp. 73–74, 408: "Articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion." In our convictions, he adds, "there is always a *plus*, a *thisness*, which feeling alone can answer for."

This is the sense in which passions ought to carry *more* weight than *mere* dispassionate reason. They might lead an enthusiastic irrationalist to proclaim that a life of passion "is contra-rational and opposed to clear thinking,"[38] but that is just another way to echo the same bias I mentioned earlier, of emotions as irrational by definition. There is nothing anti-rational about the way that, when *initially becoming concerned*, we are not reacting *in terms of* a previously existing concern. Coming to love someone, for instance, is not an inference that follows from prior considerations: if it were, then love would cease to have *reasons of its own*, to provide a significant background against which one's life makes sense. In the "Preliminary Outpouring" section of *Fear and Trembling*, the young man who "falls in love with a princess" has the conviction that "the whole content of his life consists in this love" (FT 35/SKS 4, 136). His love provides him with validation and a sense of purpose: for him, it constitutes the very "meaning of reality" (FT 36/SKS 4, 137).[39] Like the knight of faith, he will always wish to remain "true to his love" (FT 42, 106/SKS 4, 143, 207), because it defines his emotional orientation toward the world, even if it should become unhappy. This is how love or passionate commitment – or enthusiasm, care, interest, attachment, or concern – grounds our "many sided interest in the things of this world,"[40] shaping and sustaining the framework within which our lives have meaning.

Reason and the passion of faith

Karl Jaspers captures the spirit of Kierkegaard's emphasis on passion and emotion when he remarks that this is never simply a "hostility to reason," but part of an effort to appropriate "all modes of rationality,"[41] including modes of reason that have less often been granted this honorific title. Passionate thought or affective cognition is capable of missing the mark *because* it is a potentially reasonable mode of knowing, which aims at truth: and this includes emotionally perceived truths that are essential inspirations for religious life. For instance, a famous journal entry written by Kierkegaard in 1835 expresses his own longing to know what God "really wants *me* to do,"[42] showing that he accepted the notion of a divine

[38] Unamuno (1954), p. 65. Like the authors I cited in the "false assumptions" section above, Unamuno reads Kierkegaard as an irrationalist.
[39] Kierkegaard (1985), p. 72.
[40] Scheler (1973), p. 98. Cf. Frankfurt (2004), pp. 55–56.
[41] Jaspers (1955), p. 25.
[42] This is from the entry dated 1 August 1835: PAP I A 75. See also the journal entry of 2 February 1839, PAP II A 347, in which Kierkegaard implores the "god [*sic*] of Love" to guide him.

command that was addressed specifically to one person.[43] And how would a religious imperative of this kind be disclosed to the individual in question? One answer is offered in a journal entry from over a decade later, in which Kierkegaard reflects on his vocation as he has come to understand it. Here, the answer is clear: a calling "from God" can be made known through enduring feelings of passionate compulsion. As he says, describing his own impulse to write: "So powerful an urge, so ample, so inexhaustible," which has persisted for years but is "still flowing as richly as ever, such an urge must also be, one would think, a calling from God."[44] Reassuring himself about his own sense of vocation, Kierkegaard almost seems to be inquiring: how *else* could an individualized divine mandate be revealed, if not through a person's affective experience? As he writes about his mission as a religious author, "I feel a need and therefore regard it now as my duty."[45] Just as faith is "something much higher" than a merely "esthetic emotion" (FT 40/SKS 4, 141), the felt needs to which Kierkegaard refers are not capricious whims, but part of a lifetime project to discern a single imperative. As he points out, this is something that "passionless reflection" cannot do.[46] Kierkegaard's diagnosis and critique of apathetic reason – which his pseudonym announces as a main theme of *Fear and Trembling* in its earliest pages (FT 5–6/SKS 4, 103–04) – is hardly an attack on truth and reason per se. The rationality of religious belief, and of insights drawn from religious experience, can only be defended if the prevailing conception of reason is overturned, and this requires a rethinking of the nature of rationality.

Other texts argue along similar lines. For instance, in *The Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard claims that "all religiousness lies in subjectivity, in inwardness, in being deeply moved," and he adds that "it is an excellence, in the religious sense, to be shaken." Further, "when one is deeply moved" at "the most subjective point of inwardness," then "this *emotion*" is "the true working capital and the true wealth."[47] Admittedly, he qualifies these

[43] See also, for example, PAP IX A 227 and X 1 A 216. Kierkegaard's life "was controlled by the thought of a special 'call'," and he "was aware of an *order* which claimed to direct [him]." He "felt" an "insistent sense" of "a call to do a particular work for God"; and "a divine intervention which did *not* co-operate with his conscious intelligence, but ruled and overruled it." This is from the classic biography by Lowrie (1938), vol. 1, pp. 202–203, 247.

[44] Journal entry from 1847: PAP VII 1 A 222. Hannay translation. Many other Kierkegaardian works return to the idea that "God may have specific tasks for me," and "for every individual as a unique individual," as C. Stephen Evans has noted in Evans (2004), pp. 24–27. On love itself as an "urge," see Søltoft (2012).

[45] KW 22, 23–25. Here, he also claims: "My work as an author was the prompting of an irresistible inner need."

[46] KW 14, 80.

[47] KW 24, 104–08. My emphasis.

remarks by saying that "not every outpouring of religious emotion is a Christian outpouring,"[48] but – aside from the fact that this caveat has little bearing on *Fear and Trembling* – the claim about the affective basis of religious life is not retracted. This is consistent with what "Johannes de Silentio" says about Abraham, when he asserts that the father of faith "felt" and "knew" by experience the "supreme passion" which is identical with "the divine madness admired by the pagans" (FT 19–20/SKS 4, 119).[49] It seems obvious that "the passion of faith" (FT 44/SKS 4, 145) *is* literally a passion, an affective experience. To paraphrase "Johannes de Silentio" once more, the conclusions of passion are the only reliable ones (FT 87/SKS 4, 189). In his journal, Kierkegaard elaborates: "The passion of faith is the only thing that gets the better of the absurd – otherwise faith is not faith in the strictest sense, but [only] a kind of knowing."[50] To the degree that the passion of faith is alive in a believer as a felt conviction, the absurd "is not the absurd," although it seems that way from an outsider's point of view – just as a new concept of reason, which does not exclude passion, will seem irrational to an old-fashioned rationalist.

To be mistakenly assured that one has knowledge, when one does not, is to have a false confidence predicated on ignorance – and this is not to be confused with faith. The knight of faith takes delight in finite existence "as if it were the most certain thing of all" (FT 34/SKS 4, 135), although he knows very well that finite life is precarious and uncertain.[51] An Abraham imitator who *thinks he knows* would be very much unlike the real Abraham, who has the passionate capacity to believe what he cannot *prove* to be true: "Abraham believed" (FT 14–15, 17–18, *passim*/SKS 4, 114–15, 117–18).[52] Because the prophet lacks any firm knowledge about what his life means, or what direction he ought to follow, his only way to hold views about these important matters is to rely upon convictions that are maintained in the face of uncertainty. What we can *know* exactly, such as mathematical truth, is not something that we *can* have faith in. Likewise, it would be ridiculous to aim for fixed certainty, and to hold off from forming any belief whatsoever, if you are a physician diagnosing a gravely ill person but

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 112–13.

[49] As noted by the editors (FT 20n), this last phrase alludes to Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a–245d and 265a–b.

[50] Journal entry from 1850: PAP X 6 B 79. Hannay translation. On knowledge and "the infinitely indifferent," see also PAP VIII 1 A 186.

[51] This theme is developed lucidly and with great sensitivity by Krishek (2009), pp. 10–14, 18–74.

[52] See also: "[I]f he imagines himself to have faith without acknowledging the impossibility with all the passion of his soul and with his whole heart, then he deceives himself" (FT 40/SKS 4, 141). Regarding this passage, and what follows, see Mooney (1991), p. 107: "both Kant and Kierkegaard depict an unsettling tension between normative urgency and epistemic uncertainty."

not entirely sure about the cause.[53] Just as an educated but uncertain hypothesis, or belief, is critical when a sick patient needs treatment, so also a less-than-certain moral belief – "moral faith," perhaps – lets us form convictions about what to do, or how to respond, where the right action is not plainly evident. In practical reasoning, or thinking that pertains to existence, a critical role is played by beliefs that we form based on insufficient evidence. "How then did Abraham exist? He believed" (FT 54/SKS 4, 155).

The passions of Abraham: variations on a theme

What distinguishes Abraham, according to *Fear and Trembling*, is not only his willingness to obey God's command. This is clarified quite early, in the remarkable section titled "Tuning Up": here, "Johannes de Silentio" depicts four distinct ways in which Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah might be imagined. Each of these brief vignettes deviates from the story of the *true* Abraham by portraying an "Abraham" *Doppelgänger* who falls short of faith – not because of what he does, but because of *how* he does it.[54] Every one of the variant Abrahams begins promptly to follow God's command, rising early to begin the trip (FT 8–11/SKS 4, 107–11). How do they differ, then? Their failure in each case involves an improper or skewed emotional comportment. All four non-Abrahams carry out the divine imperative, but all go wrong – in a way that is revealed by their affective states.

Whereas the real Abraham is described as being surprisingly cheerful and trusting (FT 22/SKS 4, 124), the second non-Abraham will never find joy again, becoming dejected after his ordeal (FT 9/SKS 4, 109); and the Abraham variant of the fourth story clenches his left hand in anguish or despair [*Fortvivlelse*],[55] shuddering as he raises the knife (FT 10/SKS 4, 111). By way of contrast with these false Abrahams, we can infer that, according to *Fear and Trembling*, the true Abraham did *not* lose his capacity for joy,

[53] Kant (1996b), pp. A822–823/B850–851. See also, for example, PAP IV C 99: "Is knowledge higher than faith? By no means." Hannay translation. That both "faith" and "knowledge" are understood by Kierkegaard as modes of reason is made clear in this entry, which deals with "interested cognition" versus disinterested, or dispassionate, cognition.

[54] Cf. Lippitt (2003), p. 29: "All [of the 'sub-Abrahams' – Lippitt's term] are prepared to obey God and sacrifice Isaac. The fact that Johannes clearly considers them all to be inferior to 'the' Abraham shows that mere willingness to obey the will of God . . . cannot be what is being commended. (At the very least, *how* that will is obeyed is clearly a crucial factor.)"

[55] In Kierkegaard (1985), p. 47, Abraham's hand is clenched "in anguish" rather than "in despair," as Sylvia Walsh's version has it (FT 10/SKS 4, 111). The term *fortvivlelse* could be rendered either way.

nor did he become despondent. How he could do this is part of the mystery that Silentio would like to figure out, but somehow Abraham was "inwardly delighted" when he received Isaac back: he needed "no preparation, no time to collect himself in finitude and its joy" (FT 30/SKS 4, 132). In the case of non-Abraham II, even after he gets to keep Isaac, he cannot "forget that God had demanded this of him" (FT 9/SKS 4, 109). To be painfully angry or sorrowful, or to hold a grudge against God, would be understandable. Yet the real Abraham instantly forgives and is joyful about the loss that has been regained.

Turning to the first non-Abraham figure, we could locate his affective defect, and his failure of faith, in the feigned but wild-eyed horror with which he faces Isaac as he carries out his improvised Plan B, after his initial plan of explaining himself does not succeed (FT 8–9/SKS 4, 107–08).[56] However, even before his startling change of strategy, the first non-Abraham has already betrayed his lack of faith by virtue of his emotional comportment. After trying to give a reasonable account of his mission to Isaac, only to meet with incomprehension, this non-Abraham finds himself in a state of obtuse confusion and bewilderment: apparently, he had imagined that Isaac (and Sarah, perhaps) might simply agree to his initial plan.[57] Talkative and dithering, he lacks the quiet conviction of the real Abraham. Although he utters words that are "full of comfort and exhortation," and although his gaze is gentle at first (FT 8/SKS 4, 107), this kindly paternal stance is dependent on a mistake. The real Abraham does not incorrectly think that he knows what will happen, just as he does not intervene and try to control the way it unfolds.

For present purposes I have so far left aside the ambiguous and elliptical prose poems that follow each vignette of Isaac's binding, each about a mother weaning her baby. However, in the case of narrative three, it is useful to examine the poem first:

> When the child is to be weaned, the mother too is not without sorrow that she and the child are more and more to be parted . . . Thus together they mourn this brief sorrow. Fortunate the one who kept the child so close and did not need to sorrow more! (FT 10/SKS 4, 110)

[56] Again, see Kierkegaard (1985), p. 45: "his gaze was wild, his mien one of horror." Compare the Hong translation, p. 10: "his gaze was wild, his whole being was sheer terror" (SKS 4, 107). *Rædsel* is the Danish word for "terror" or "horror."

[57] On confusion and bewilderment as emotions see, for example, Ellsworth (2003), pp. 81–85; and Roberts (2003a), p. 181. It is noteworthy that, in some quarters of psychological research, "confusion-bewilderment" is one of the standard affective categories.

Here, there is *some* sorrow, but it only lasts for a limited time: mother and child are going through a transition that is painful but obligatory, if the child is to grow up into an independent person. So, although this transitional period is painful, it is only for a brief duration and not to be regretted. Non-Abraham III is tormented by grief and remorse after the fact, although this distinguishing feature escapes mention in many accounts of the "Tuning Up" narratives.[58] If it is indeed deplorable to be lost in sorrow either too much or for too long, then this Abraham variant is guilty of excess. Still, to his credit, he has not lost his ability to engage passionately in finite existence – in other words, to love.

He is apparently the only one of the four Abraham variants who is emotionally in distress about whether or not he has "loved Isaac" adequately (FT 10/SKS 4, 110), and – after an affectionate farewell to Sarah, for whom Isaac is "her delight, her joy," as he knows – he falls into a pensive state and shows concern about "Hagar and the son whom he turned out into the desert" (FT 10/SKS 4, 110). Maybe he simply misses them, and wishes they could have stayed, or perhaps he still worries about their fate, since he cares about how they are faring. Yet he meditates on this in a somber way, as if to suggest that he is holding on too much to what he has loved, even after the loss of these two beloveds, Hagar and Ishmael, appears to have been a required step in the fulfillment of his divinely sanctioned destiny. Unlike the true Abraham, he continues to have second thoughts about his decisions and their implications; thus, another of his imperfections is his relentless self-questioning. On a "quiet evening" after Isaac's binding, he goes out alone and pleads with God for forgiveness, plagued by a sense of remorse, but even after this he "found no peace of mind" (FT 10/SKS 4, 110). Passionately ruminating over whether or not he is guilty in relation to Isaac, he woefully ponders the loss of his *other* son, whom he also loved but who had to be sacrificed when Isaac showed up. To the point of distraction, he remains powerfully affected by emotions having to do with the past, and how things might have been otherwise.

A genuine prophet, such as the biblical Abraham, would not be held up by misgivings, according to *Fear and Trembling*. From Abraham, we are

[58] Lippitt stresses the "confusion" that is manifested by the third "sub-Abraham," although not in such a way as to take into account his emotional feelings or his passionate disposition. See Lippitt (2003), pp. 25–27. Clare Carlisle, who notes the importance of *how* Abraham carries out his task, nevertheless finds all except the first of the "weaning" passages to be "less evidently in parallel with the stories they follow," conceding that she has little use for the passage I cited above: Carlisle (2010), pp. 49–50. It seems to me that all four "weaning" poems offer highly suggestive parallels, although I cannot pursue this further at the moment.

reminded, "there is no song of lament" (FT 14/SKS 4, 114). But despite his flaws, and although the variant Abraham in this third vignette is presented in the third person, we are afforded further insight into his perspective than in the other versions. We overhear a few thoughts of the first non-Abraham, because he talks to himself, yet in none of the variations except III are we given a revealing glimpse into the subjectivity of a human being. With the Abraham of the third narrative, we are aware to some degree of *what he is experiencing*. This is of the utmost importance, because it shows *how* he is inwardly oriented toward *what* he is outwardly doing, and allows readers to grasp why "the quality of his attunement"[59] is decisive. Regardless of how we feel about the passions of non-Abraham III, his example draws our attention to the question of "what is it like" to *be* Abraham, as opposed to how Abraham looks to the observer. Much of *Fear and Trembling* has to do with wanting "to see Abraham" (FT 7/SKS 4, 105), to be an eyewitness who admires and is amazed (FT 32, 101/SKS 4, 133, 202),[60] and who exclaims that no one can understand the father of faith (FT 11/SKS 4, 111). Some readers of *Fear and Trembling* are content to rest with this conclusion, that not-understanding is the final word. And maybe it is. Yet if the man of faith is truly an exemplar, instead of a spectacle merely,[61] we should not be too comfortable admiring him from a distance, as an unfathomable mystery. If Abraham is completely foreign to us, a character who has nothing in common with other human beings, then we can dismiss him as irrelevant. Or, we *could* stipulate dogmatically that Abraham was addressed directly by God, and refrain from envisioning how this might have taken place. But another interpretive path is available, one that is signaled by the focus on *attunement* in the section "Tuning Up."[62] Because each of the non-Abrahams goes *wrong* in a way that is shown in

[59] A phrase that Edward Mooney uses to characterize all four of the non-Abrahams in this part of the text. See Mooney (1991), pp. 28–29.

[60] In "Tuning Up" this incomprehension is stated in the form of a question, but "Johannes de Silentio" asserts repeatedly later in the text that *he*, at least, "cannot understand" Abraham (FT 27, 31/SKS 4, 128–29, 132) – often making it clear that he would be surprised if anyone else could (FT 106/SKS 4, 207). Cf. Mulhall (2001), p. 373: "Attempting to make oneself present to a climactic episode in another person's relationship with God does not amount to making oneself present to God."

[61] Silentio never ceases to be fascinated by Abraham, saying that it is "blessed to behold the believer" (FT 14–15/SKS 4, 114), and that he is "virtually annihilated" when he thinks of Abraham (FT 27/SKS 4, 128). He wishes that he could "spend all [his] time" watching and admiring a knight of faith, if he could find one (FT 32/SKS 4, 133). On this "spectacular" aspect of *Fear and Trembling*, and the "voyeuristic" tendencies of its pseudonymous author, see Mooney (2007), pp. 137–56.

[62] This section is also translated as "Attunement," for instance by Hannay. I am grateful to Sarah Pessin and to Sharon Krishek for helpful conversations about this section.

his emotional disposition, it must be possible to be *right* in one's affective attunement; this, then, invites us to ask, "what is it like" to be Abraham, insofar as he exemplifies the passion of faith (FT 108/SKS 4, 209). That is, how should we imagine what the *true* Abraham felt and experienced, from his reception of God's imperative in Genesis 22:1 until the moment when he hears the angel revising that imperative only ten verses later? In the compact scriptural narrative, Abraham's state of mind is largely hidden;[63] but from the outset, *Fear and Trembling* encourages us to reflect upon how the prophet felt and what he was thinking.

The phenomenology of religious experience

> If an angel comes to me, what proof is there that it's an angel? And if I hear voices, what proof is there that they come from heaven and not from hell, or from the subconscious, or a pathological condition?[64]

In his tribute to Abraham, "Johannes de Silentio" comments that the father of faith "knew it was God the Almighty who tested him" (FT 18/SKS 4, 118). Recalling our earlier discussion of knowledge and belief, does this imply that Abraham's faith was only a secure logical certainty? Not at all, unless Kierkegaard's pseudonym is ascribing to Abraham the delusion of having perfect *knowledge* about God's command, as if he had some definitive proof of this. And about every "existential proposition" – such as *I heard a voice*, or even *I am not dreaming* – we cannot attain the certainty that attaches only to logical or necessary truth. As Kierkegaard contends, a "man of conviction" is "not ignorant of this [uncertainty]; he knows well enough what doubt is able to say," but "he has made a resolution."[65] In *Fear and Trembling*, the confidence of someone who is "convinced that her wish will be fulfilled" is said to be nothing when compared with Abraham's passionate faith (FT 40–41/SKS 4, 141–42); believing that one's wish *will* be granted is not the same as believing that it *might*, since the former attitude pays no heed to the uncertainty that is nonetheless involved. Johannes de Silentio asks how a "single individual" such as Abraham can possibly be assured "that he is justified" (FT 54/SKS 4, 155): although Abraham cannot exactly *know* this, he is depicted in *Fear and Trembling* as feeling convinced of his prophetic mission. What, then, is it like for him to arrive at that conviction? Did he literally *hear* a voice? If not, how was

[63] Cf. Boehm (2007), p. 41. [64] Sartre (1985), p. 19.

[65] This is from PAP VII 1 A 215, where Kierkegaard also says, "there can be no conviction with respect to mathematics," because "no disproof is conceivable."

God's imperative *given* to him? Teresa of Avila, for instance, spoke of hearing voices but then explained that these were not actually *heard* in the ordinary sense: for her, the consciousness of God's presence involves no auditory experience.[66] Could it be that the divine words were impressed upon Abraham in this way? What made him feel convinced that his instruction was from God, and that he had perceived it accurately? Although Silentio asks, "So what should Abraham have done?" (FT 62/SKS 4, 162), and wonders whether he might have "made a mistake" (FT 53/SKS 4, 154), *Fear and Trembling* generally supports the view that Abraham's problem "is not whether he is hearing God's word."[67] Even so, we are at liberty to wonder what Abraham's experience was like: was it a *passionate* event, a feeling of *being moved* or acted upon?[68] Unless "God spoke to Abraham" is just an unquestionable premise, we are free to ask: "What is the criterion of correct hearing?"[69] In other words, how did he know? Or, how did he decide to "take" it this way, and to take on such a weighty responsibility? What was it like, phenomenologically, for the prophet to receive and accept the divine imperative?

This is significant because of what the "Tuning Up" section does *not* talk about, in any of its four variations on the story. They all begin with one or another "non-Abraham" setting out to perform what God has already commanded (FT 8–11/SKS 4, 107–11). *Fear and Trembling* is oddly silent about the issue of how a revelatory communication, such as Abraham *ex hypothesi* experienced, ought to be imagined from the recipient's perspective. At the beginning, how did he come to feel convinced that he had heard the word of God? The queries that were just raised – about how the prophet felt, saw, heard, or experienced the divine imperative being given to him – would seem to be "central to the intelligibility of the text," as one commentator has suggested.[70] That is, they *would* be central to its intelligibility, *if* they were raised in the text. What is striking is how seldom these glaring questions appear to dawn on Johannes de Silentio, despite his obsession with Abraham, what he was thinking, and how he acted. Silentio inquires about whether "the individual has misunderstood the deity"

[66] As described in Mavrodes (1988), pp. 133–34. Teresa did, however, "hear" specific words that were silently apprehended and experienced as having a divine origin.

[67] I cite Sagi (2000), p. 125.

[68] In Emmauel (1996), p. 78, we are reminded that the classical "roots of the word *passion*," denoting "action being done to a subject," were quite familiar to Kierkegaard.

[69] Sagi (2000), p. 131.

[70] But they are not – that is, questions such as whether Abraham "misheard" God's command are not visible in *Fear and Trembling* "at the level of argument," although Poole rather fancifully claims that they are. See Poole (2002), pp. 404–05. For a critique of Poole's view, see Tietjen (2013), pp. 24–27.

(FT 53/SKS 4, 154), but even this question is asked from the onlooker's vantage point. It is framed in the past tense, and has to do with the veracity of a message already received – not with the message's initial reception. To find Kierkegaard's treatment of the questions that are predominantly sidestepped in *Fear and Trembling*, it will be necessary to look elsewhere.

What Abraham cannot know

After *Fear and Trembling* was published, Kierkegaard returned several times to the story of Abraham and Isaac, as if to expand the "Tuning Up" section so that it would include more than the four narratives. Two notebook entries are particularly of interest, due to the way in which they address the question of how Abraham might have experienced the divine command. Envisioning it differently again, Kierkegaard opens up an untold area of the story, since *how* Abraham heard God's command and *whether* he had any doubts about it are questions left unaddressed in the Genesis account as well. No matter how we envisage Abraham's experience of God's command, it remains conceivable that he has construed it wrongly. An audible voice, or a sense of God's presence such as Teresa of Avila felt, or a non-verbal "inner voice" that transmits specific promptings of the kind that Socrates experienced,[71] would in any case need to be interpreted. Any mode in which God might actually reply to one's appeal for guidance about *what I must do* would also demand interpretation. This imposes a "dreadful responsibility" on a person, and explains the turmoil that is emblematic of religious experience:[72] individuals "bear the burden of decoding God's word," and deciding whether and how to act on it. Abraham must do more than simply hear and listen. After all, even a voice that speaks from the clouds is not self-verifying.[73]

While it is hyperbolic to claim that Kierkegaard "concerned himself solely with religious experience,"[74] it is nonetheless true that Abraham's response to what he construed as a divine command (and his experience of that command) stayed on Kierkegaard's mind for years after *Fear and Trembling*. The need for the prophet to take a stand, to make an interpretive decision, accounts for what Silentio already noted, the "distress and anxiety" without which "Abraham is not who he is" (FT 23–24, 66/SKS 4, 125–26, 166). The plain answer to Sartre's demand for proof is that one *cannot* prove, or know, this sort of thing. What we *can* say is that the

[71] See Plato, *Apology* 31c–d, 40a–c; Plato, *Phaedrus* 242b–c. [72] Sagi (2000), pp. 127–29.
[73] Hume (1998), p. 23. [74] So claims Drucker (1949), pp. 587–88.

prophet is open and receptive toward the possibility of being moved, and guided, by a higher power (see FT 18/SKS 4, 117).[75] Yet in both of Kierkegaard's later notebook entries on the topic, Abraham does not comprehend what God is trying to tell him; as a result, blood is spilled and confusion ensues. The portrayal of Abraham's consciousness from a first-person, experiential perspective generates a sense that we as readers are sharing in his spiritual trial. This makes us shudder over what the prophet undergoes and puzzle over how he *could* have felt confident enough to have acted on what he *thought* he heard. The overwhelming question, then, is: how can he *feel* assured?

In the later of the two notebook entries, Kierkegaard recounts of a new variant "Abraham" that "he cut the wood and he bound Isaac and he lighted the fire," and then "he drew his knife – and he thrust it into Isaac." At that moment, God appears. He asks, "old man, what have you done? Did you not hear what I said; did you not hear me cry out: Abraham, Abraham, stop!"[76] The earlier of the two entries begins similarly, but looks further into what Abraham is experiencing: "And he split the firewood; and he bound Isaac; and he lit the fire; and he drew the knife – and thrust it into Isaac!" Right then, God shows up beside him, saying:

> What have you done, you poor old man! That was not required of you at all; you were my friend, and I merely wanted to test your faith! And I also shouted to you in the last moment, I shouted: Abraham, Abraham, stop![77]

That this "Abraham" is "on the margin of insanity,"[78] to say the very least, becomes more clear when we hear his response:

> [I]n a voice faint with … the broken feebleness of a deranged mind, Abraham answered: "O Lord, I did not hear it; yet now that you speak of it, it seems to me that I did hear such a voice … [When] it is you who commands a father to kill his own son, one is somewhat overstrained at such a moment – therefore I did not hear the voice.

This "Abraham" *almost* hears God yelling at him to stop: once it is mentioned to him, he can recall hearing *something*, but it did not register.

[75] Gouwens (1996), p. 119: "In Abraham the dialectic of active and passive continues, with even greater emphasis on receptivity." Cf. Mooney (1991), p. 100: "essential to getting Isaac back" is "not power but reception."

[76] PAP X 5 A 132, translated by the Hongs as a supplement to KW 6, 270. This passage, written in 1853, is also NB 28: 41.

[77] This entry was written in 1851: PAP X 4 A 338. It is also translated by the Hongs as a supplement to Kierkegaard (1985), pp. 267–68. NB 24: 89.

[78] Dalrymple (2010), pp. 77–78.

He is "overstrained" [*anstrenget*], on edge, fretful, stressed, or under pressure – as one might say. Like the "Abraham" of the other notebook passage, he is passionately agitated; however, his feelings are hard to name. Here is how his explanation continues:

> When you command me to sacrifice my child – and at the critical moment a voice is heard that says, "Stop," I am obliged to think it is the tempter's voice that wants to [prevent] me from carrying out your will . . . [E]ither I had to assume that the voice that told me to sacrifice Isaac was the tempter's voice, and then I would not have set out, [or] . . . since I was convinced that [the first] was your voice, I had to conclude that the other voice was the voice of the tempter.[79]

Either he takes to heart the initial command, in light of which the second call, when the angel cries out and tells him to stop, must be dismissed as a false temptation which goes against God's word; or else, he doubts the legitimacy of the first voice, and does not undertake this mission in the first place. No wonder, then, that Abraham was emotionally overstrained as he attempted to execute God's command. He cannot possibly be sure about what he is doing: either way, one might say, "he will regret it."[80]

According to *Fear and Trembling*, the real Abraham somehow "knew it was God" (FT 18/SKS 4, 117): maybe his experience was attended by the "noetic quality" that William James and others have noticed as a common feature of religious experience.[81] Yet even if God's command had an inherent feeling of certainty, Abraham cannot take all passionate convictions at face value: could not a "seeming" religious inspiration be nothing but a fleeting whim of his own? He certainly does not wait to find out whether it is just one of those "passing emotions" that "everyone has" (FT 25/SKS 4, 127), and that are not to be taken seriously.[82] But the two later binding narratives testify in favor of the conclusion that Abraham *cannot know* whether he has misheard God's command, or whether he has taken a mistaken course of action based upon what he heard *or thought he heard*. There is no way to rule out a fatal misunderstanding, one in which

[79] If "the tempter" here is the same one who negotiates with God in the Book of Job, then "the accuser" might be a more appropriate term. On how this trouble-making character is understood in Judaism, see Wettstein (2012), pp. 155n, 164–65.

[80] Hannay (2001), p. 194. He is alluding to an "ecstatic discourse" in *Either/Or I*. Also picking up on the "morbid comedy" that operates here is Weinstein (2005), pp. 15–16.

[81] See, for example, James (1990), p. 343.

[82] "Faith's primary feature is its affective dimension," as Tietjen correctly observes; however, this means that not *all* feelings can be disdained as "mere feelings, which ebb and flow." See Tietjen (2013), pp. 91, 99.

Abraham is overwhelmed, just after he acts, by an awful sense that he has done something irremediably wrong.

On knowing how to believe

> Whatever God has revealed to us must be accepted as more certain than anything else.[83]

When she is asked what it is that she can do well, the lead character in the film *Breaking the Waves* by Lars von Trier says: "I can believe."[84] About Abraham we are told that "even at the moment when the knife gleamed he believed" (FT 29/SKS 4, 131). If we can see why "proficiency in believing" (FT 5/SKS 4, 102–03) might even potentially be a virtue, then it should not be difficult for us to identify Abraham as an epitome of this trait of character, the ability to believe. He has the "ability to . . . march forward, not knowing where the path will lead," placing trust in God all the way.[85] Although he cannot foresee how he could possibly retain his son after obeying God's command, he believes and trusts that *somehow* this will be possible, and that ultimately it will not be an absurd loss – as it might appear to be at the moment (FT 39/SKS 4, 141). Abraham also believes that the son whom he has loved will remain with him, in some way; he has faith that Isaac, and the promise of future generations, will somehow continue to have meaning in the grand narrative of which he is a part. He knows that he was called by name even before the night when God brought him outside to be dazzled by all the stars in the desert sky, asking if he could count them.[86] And he trusts that "God is concerned about the least thing" (FT 28/SKS 4, 129).

The capacity to believe, the receptivity to being moved by an inward power whose directives are held sacred, does not afford a person any guarantee of becoming "blissfully happy" in the end (FT 30/SKS 4, 131). A knight of faith *trusts* that all will be well, but not in a naïve way: he knows that "in the finite world there is much that is not possible" (FT 37/SKS 4, 138). Since his or her faith is *for this life* (see FT 17/SKS 4, 116), the knight of faith cannot be comforted by any false hopes that a beloved person who dies will be encountered again. Yet if we accept some of Kierkegaard's claims about the limits of apathetic reason, we should also appreciate how one's life might be enriched if one is open to being moved

[83] René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, as quoted in *Fear and Trembling* (see FT 4).
[84] The screenplay is published in book format: von Trier (1996), p. 106.
[85] Wettstein (2012), p. 171. [86] Genesis 15:5.

by a passionate dictate that pertains to nobody else.[87] When the imperative has a divine sanction, the person's life takes on a more elevated meaning: it has validity and meaning in the widest scheme of things, provided that she is not mistaken and that her trust is not betrayed. If the knight of faith *is* in error, or misled, then all is lost: for then, he would have "felt the pain of renouncing everything, the dearest thing he has in the world" (FT 34/SKS 4, 135), for no reason. In both of Kierkegaard's later revisions of the "binding" narrative, God tries to remedy things after the apparent disaster – but not everything is possible within finite existence. Here is the 1851 version:

> Then Abraham set off for home. And the Lord gave him a new Isaac. But Abraham did not look at him with joy; when he saw him, he shook his head and said: This is not Isaac.[88]

One idea suggested by that twist of the plot is that *we* may be unable to receive again what we have sacrificed, whether or not *it* is the same as before. But the knight of faith is somehow able to do better than this, since the passion of faith involves lovingly embracing once again what is most precious to us, namely, that which we have just relinquished. "It is great to give up one's wish, but it is greater to keep a firm grip on it after having given it up" (FT 15/SKS 4, 115), as Silentio remarks. Abraham can regain what he had infinitely resigned because he is free of the delusion that "we are absolute masters of our world."[89] With the wisdom of unknowing, the knight of faith suspends judgment about where he or she will be guided and what will happen next.

In the 1835 journal entry cited earlier, the one in which Kierkegaard urgently asks (at a time of spiritual crisis) *what God wants him to do*, he refers to what he is seeking as "a truth which is truth *for me*, . . . *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*."[90] The belief that Kierkegaard eventually formed in his vocation as a religious author has already been cited as an example of a passionate conviction that one's direction in life is divinely enjoined. Explaining how his own daimonic prompting operates, he says: "Governance, who is compassionate love," can "use" a person in this way "precisely out of love." He adds that "it was not my idea to become a

[87] For a discussion of this "readiness" in relation to the Jewish tradition, and the story of Abraham specifically, see Gellman (1994), pp. 47–48.

[88] In the 1853 variation, it goes like this: "Then [God] brought Isaac back to life. But in quiet sorrow Abraham thought . . . it is not the same Isaac."

[89] This phrase is from Krishek (2009), p. 131. Cf. Krishek and Furtak (2012), pp. 167–68.

[90] PAP I A 75, Hannay translation.

religious author," but "in me the need to write was so great that I could not do otherwise."[91] The source of his conviction that he is guided from without is that he is passionately driven from within.

What is "primary," he writes in a less overtly autobiographic mode, is "the idea in the unopened form of feeling and inspiration" – which "impels the individual by its inner drive."[92] And he makes it clear that he is speaking about a *passionate* phenomenon when he adds in the next sentence: "The person without passion lacks this." Magister Adler, who lacked constancy in his self-interpretation, nonetheless shared with those who are more plausibly inspired "the excellence" that he "was shaken, was deeply moved," and that by virtue of this his life "has acquired a rhythm very different from the cab-horse trot in which most people, in the religious sense, go through life." What happens to "most people," Kierkegaard continues, is that "they never in self-concern sense each his own *I* and the pulse beat and heartbeat of his own self. They live too objectively to be aware of something like that, and if they hear mention of it they tranquilize themselves with the explanation that such things are hysteria, hypochondria, etc."[93]

Many people will also dismiss as nervous agitation the sort of powerful affective impulse, experienced inwardly and enduring over time, that according to Kierkegaard *might* be the true sign of a divine calling or command.[94] That would be one way to prohibit in advance the possibility of authentic religious experience, and of course there are others. Yet in Kierkegaard's view, this is nothing but lukewarm philistinism – a frame of mind that traps a person in spiritless mediocrity. Why is this appealing? The idea of being summoned to realize a distinctive potential, that only *you* might achieve, is terrifying and intimidating. So one might find comfort in rejecting that idea (see FT 66–67/SKS 4, 167). Yet *Fear and Trembling* provokes us to ask ourselves: do we really want to take this stance? When God calls out to Abraham, he answers: "Here I am." Johannes de Silentio reminds us of this, and then inquires: "was that the case with you? . . . When a call came to you, did you answer or not – perhaps softly and in a whisper?" (FT 18/SKS 4, 117). These words are intended to put us to shame, if we have not taken the hint after having intimations of what is asked of us and what we might become. What is at issue here is not only personal courage: it is how we conceive of the human

[91] See KW 22, 86–87. [92] KW 14, 101. [93] KW 24, 103.

[94] Recall the passage (PAP VII 1 A 222) that was cited above: "So powerful an urge, so ample, so inexhaustible . . . such an urge must also be, one would think, a calling from God."

mind, and what we ought to hold sacred. If Kierkegaard is right and Maimonides is wrong on the topic of passion and truthfulness, then reliance on dispassionate reason *alone* is not only irrational (due to its false presumption about our mental powers) but also atheistic.

Great prophets and mystics do not yield to every "fleeting sentiment" or to all "palpitations of the nerves" (FT 25, 37/SKS 4, 127, 138): as we are told by a scholar of religious experience, disciplined mystics "are unanimous in warning their disciples against . . . attributing too much importance" to "voices," or "accepting them at their face value as messages from God."[95] Even though notable attempts have been made to secure experiential criteria to detect *what it is like* to undergo a movement of soul that is truly "from God," such as Ignatius of Loyola's "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits,"[96] ultimately a person faces the same need for interpretation that Abraham faced, no matter what he or she has heard or felt. One thing that makes a person a knight of faith is his or her ability to sustain tenaciously a belief that he or she has been authentically in touch with God. Rather than being dispassionate and spiritless, such a person has the *passion* and the *spirit* to believe (FT 35–38/SKS 4, 138–39). Abraham's faith is similar to the love that *believes all things*,[97] at least insofar as it prevails over distrust. Ultimately, if the prophet still seems irrational, his actions morally questionable, then we ought to know that this cannot be simply because he is guided by passion and emotion rather than apathetic rationality.

[95] Underhill (1990), p. 268. [96] In Ignatius of Loyola (1991), pp. 201–07.
[97] See the chapter – number II in the second series – entitled "Love Believes All Things – and Yet Is Never Deceived," in WL 225–45.

CHAPTER 9

Birth, love, and hybridity: Fear and Trembling *and the* Symposium

Edward F. Mooney and Dana Lloyd

Death is a grim reaper; birth, a seedling, full of hope. Birth is the promise of beginnings and fresh starts. Death is news that there are no more beginnings or fresh starts. Death is familiar philosophical fodder. But why do finales trump brave openings and beginnings? Why are birth, hope, and new growth so seldom explored philosophically? Perhaps we take Silenus' bitter warning to heart, "Better to die young, best never to have been born." Then there is Job's aching misogyny: "Man who is born of a woman is of few days and full of sorrow: he cometh forth like a flower and is cut down."[1] Could he have been spared if he were *not* born of a woman, if he had been born of an angel, a demon, of God, or (heaven forbid!) . . . of a *man*?

Gender, mortality, natality

To talk of birth and beginnings is to talk of women, wombs, and nursing, and many have thought that these are hardly fit topics for philosophical discussion.[2] Kierkegaard may be the exception here. Death may seem *more noble* a topic, yet Kierkegaard, as we will see, can give nobility to mothers, to birthing and to weaning.[3] We are mortal *and* born, *and* "of woman born."[4] Hannah Arendt holds that the condition of *natality* – of being

Dana Lloyd (LLM and MA in Philosophy from Tel Aviv University, PhD student in Religion at Syracuse University) produced the first draft of this chapter. The present version is an improvisation on the first by Ed Mooney. As it neared completion, the encouraging and astute responses of Dan Conway became indispensable.

[1] Job 14:1–15: Man *that is* born of a woman *is* of few days, and full of trouble.

[2] This will do as a sweeping generalization. It needs to be modified if we take into account feminist philosophical criticism since, let us say, 1970. But see note 12, below.

[3] A mother holding a child is prominent in *Fear and Trembling*, and occurs elsewhere, as well. Kierkegaard broaches birth, weaning, and natality before these become themes for philosophy in the late twentieth century. Nursing (and weaning?) is also a prerogative of males: "when the child has rested long enough at the mother's breast *it is laid at the father's*, and he too nourishes it with his flesh and blood." Kierkegaard (1985), p. 420; (1983), p. 72 (my emphasis).

[4] See Rich (1995).

born – is a limit-condition of life just as momentous as mortality.[5] In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard brings birth and the maternal into philosophical focus. Death may be revitalizing, as Kierkegaard noticed.[6] Birth can let us absorb the intimate wonder that I exist, in this body, in this age, in this language, held and released by this brother, by this mother.

Giving birth is figured as woman's provenance and domain, while giving death is figured as man's. With its focus on Abraham raising a knife against his son, in *Fear and Trembling* death and violence are inescapable. Yet surprisingly, birth and nurturance are no less inescapable, for we find in *Fear and Trembling* a mother and child, four mothers, four infants. In the opening pages of the "Attunement," they run cheek and jowl against four Abrahams and four Isaacs. This repeated mother–child motif gives us two would-be persons, the child and the mother. Both exist prior to full individuation, joined in a kind of hybrid unity. Are these in fact cameo appearances of *Isaac*'s weaning from Sarah? Or *Abraham*'s forced weaning from God? (God blackens his breast that Abraham may be set free, may become his own person.) In any case, at weaning an infant's love can blossom as more than hunger, and the mother's love can blossom then as more than feeding. (God sets Abraham free from the assumption he will always be fed sweet milk from God.) The repeated mother–child motif functions to counterbalance the four appearances of father-son on Moriah. Kierkegaard, or his pseudonym Johannes *de silentio,* answers each *paternal* Abraham portrait of trauma with an echo, with a gentle *maternal* portrait of separation and new life.

These are not just pen-and-ink sketches but capsule parables unfolding around an image, each Abraham parable sketched just above the Mother parable, so that on the page we see a sequence of four pairs. Each single parable is a reading of its pair, its counterpart, which can be read up or down against its couple: the mother can be a parable of the father, or the father, a parable of the mother. And in the background hovers Genesis 22, reminding us that Johannes *de silentio* gives us, within the compass of three printed pages, eight parables or midrashim on the biblical text.[7] An impending weaning serves as a parable of an impending bloody sacrifice, and an impending bloody sacrifice is a parable of an impending weaning.[8]

[5] See O'Byrne (2010), ch. 4. [6] See Mooney (2012), chs. 9, 10.

[7] Johannes *de silentio* gives a 'free interpretation' of those aspects of the Genesis account that strike him as crucial. He is not giving a scholarly exegesis of the Genesis account committed to the entire story of the binding, including lead-in verses and follow-ups.

[8] Separation and individuation are main themes in Rashi's commentary on the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible. See also, Zornberg (1995).

We are given what Harold Bloom would call 'strong misreadings.' They are misreadings because the Ur-text remains always elusive, no matter how brilliant the effort at deciphering. The primal text is an enigmatic image of faith. Johannes *de silentio* struggles with the apprehension that he cannot really fathom where the enigmatic ends. So he tries and tries again to unravel the marvel of faith. Each of his coupled attempts fails (and multiple further attempts, in the subsequent one hundred-odd pages of *Fear and Trembling,* also fail). The lesson is that faith is always a trial to the understanding, never a resting spot with all questions comfortably answered. Faith pleads for understanding, but the plea is only half answered, and answered badly. Perhaps partial understanding, or even misunderstanding, is all that a faithful response to an Ur-text of faith can hope for. We cannot quite understand either the faith of Abraham or the faith of the mother.

From another angle, we have sketches of *apophatic events*, events that can be sketched only as a 'negative theology,' or 'negative portrait' – revealing only what faith is *not*, Neti, Neti. We are given an infinitely alluring image that infinitely repels mastery-through-understanding. The glimpses of faith are glimpses of *not quite what it is – or glimpses of what it is not*. Yet we are not to abandon the struggle, nor rest content in cognitive failure. As Kant will say, in another context, we are doomed to ask questions knowing that answers will be forever withheld.[9] Even so, the questions of faith can be transposed to slightly more tractable areas. The images of Abrahams and mothers can be recast to raise adjacent queries: "What is love? What is individuation? What are birth and natality?" These probe an important periphery of faith. We may be baffled by faith, but we can gather into our thinking moments of that phenomenon. We can ponder the contrast between a father who promises a violent *separation* from life (despite his hope for the return of that life), and the mother who promises a gentle release *into* life (despite her loss of her suckling).

Scandalous omission

The challenge of interpreting the binding of Isaac (the *Akedah*) is as old as the first telling and continues unabated through endless generations of devoted and skeptical readings – confrontations and contestations that endlessly come up short when it comes to hermeneutic closure.[10] As

[9] Metaphysical efforts are endeavors "that [we] can never abandon and yet [are] unable to carry to completion." Kant (1965), p. 295 (A 235–36; B 294–95).

[10] In many ways, Kierkegaard–*Johannes de silentio,* in the lyrical openings, provide midrashim. See Jacob Howland's contribution to this volume.

Kierkegaard scholars of sorts, we can face an additional challenge at quite a different level. If the *Akedah* is a scandal, it is also a scandal that readers of *Fear and Trembling* can have said so little – next to nothing until the 1990s – about Kierkegaard's brilliant innovation. No one notices that the *binding* of Isaac is countered by the *weaning* of Isaac. Feminist commentators from the 1970s and 1980s have asked about Sarah's exclusion from the drama. Few indeed have noticed the inclusion of a mother in a drama of separation and individuation.[11]

A deafening silence surrounds Johannes *de silentio's* startling improvisation.[12] Could it be that the horror of Abraham's knife blinds us, making attention to *anything else* improbable? Or could it be that repulsion at the sight of weaning diverts our gaze *back* to the dazzling knife? If so, we would be attesting to horror *greater* than a raised knife – exposure to a blackened breast.[13] In any case, by inserting the mother and infant, cheek and jowl to Abraham and Isaac, Johannes *de silentio* creates double disruption.

The first occurs in inserting a weaning mother *at all–anywhere*. The bare presence of this image has to come labeled as an *unwelcome intrusion*. The second layer of disruption occurs in the untoward *juxtaposition,* or even *union* of two images – each, for different reasons, upsetting or terrifying. If Abraham mounting Moriah bodies forth a bundle of cross-purposes and colliding imperatives (protect thy son, do not kill, bring thy son to be sacrificed) and if a weaning mother with blackened breast delivers a perplexing (even repulsive) interruption of the classical *Akedah* scenario, then juxtaposing, or uniting, these becomes *more* wildly untoward than either taken separately. The *Binding* is already billed as one of the most terrifying and inscrutable events in the Hebrew Bible. Why increase the pitch of cacophony by putting *violent paternal sacrifice* in such immediate proximity to *tender maternal weaning*?

Note that this pairing lets one scenario temper, or intensify, its other. If a father's near-sacrifice of his son fixes a benchmark of faith's raw intensity, by osmosis the intensity of a maternal weaning is correspondingly *inflated*. The scene on Moriah *horrifies* us. A degree of that horror leaks down to the

[11] We have Mooney's discussions of the mother–infant motif in Mooney (1991), and (2013), ch. 6. Also, see Williams (1998), pp. 310–18; and Rumble's contribution to this volume.

[12] Claire Katz gives a thorough development of the feminine and maternal, bringing *Fear and Trembling* into focus. Her meticulous (2003), devotes more time to *Fear and Trembling* from a feminist standpoint than any essay or chapter we know, and is wonderfully helpful. Yet nursing mothers appear only in a footnote. The essays in Leon and Walsh (1997) make no mention of the mothers. The blindness is not just male.

[13] The philosopher–psychotherapist Julia Kristeva will call this avoidance "abjection" – a nauseous revulsion at the viscous, slimy, and ill-defined. See Mooney (2011).

weaning. The scene on Moriah is *momentous*. A degree of that momentousness leaks down to the weaning. If faith is measured by a mother's compassionate weaning, then by osmosis that tenderness rises up, and the intensity of Moriah is lowered a notch. Each scenario *improvises* on the other.

The conclusion is not that the Moriah event is as banal as breastfeeding, nor that the Weaning-event is as horrific as immanent child-sacrifice. The conclusion is that our judgments are labile, like swinging emotions and morphing facts. The Moriah-event becomes *possibly less* horrific than *de silentio* initially sees it, or not *only* horrific. The Weaning-event becomes *possibly more* horrific than *de silentio* sees it, or not *only* tender. Furthermore, the pairing of mutually qualifying images reminds us that images can be *parables* of one another. And overall, we should be convinced that grappling or dancing with the enigmas of faith is an imaginative, hermeneutical improvisational exercise that in this case at least, passes over the mainstream philosopher's penchant for sure-grip argumentation – which is surely, in this case, unavailable.

It is a measure of *de silentio*'s brilliance that he leaves things labile and morphing, without trying to answer what exact level of horror, tenderness, or momentousness, *ought* to prevail in our readings. Faithfulness can be a horror of which no greater can be conceived. Faithfulness can be a tender intimacy of which no greater can be conceived. Faithfulness can be embodied in figures of titanic, monumental impact, or in figures who are nothing if not banal, pedestrian – a shopkeeper strolling across town, a mother weaning her child. *De silentio* teases with silence on the proper degree of faith's horror or tenderness, banality or momentousness.

Later, *de silentio* teases with silence on a more 'dialectical' question: whether there can be what he calls "a teleological suspension of the ethical." And he even teases with silence on whether it is really *faith* that grabs his attention. Not, whether it is tender or terrifying, but whether it is fraudulent through and through. To an outsider, his excitement and fascination with Moriah can seem to be focused not by faith but by having an expensive ringside seat at a blood-curdling faux-religious carnival side show.[14]

Johannes *de silentio* seems thrilled by a world-class spectacle and melodrama. He wants to watch Abraham climb up Moriah, peeking through the trees from a safe distance. Can *that* get him closer to faith than if he stayed quietly at home, while Abraham trudged? He pictures a would-be

[14] See Mooney (2007).

'knight of infinite resignation' in a melodrama of a young man in love with an unattainable princess. Can *that* sentimental story get him a step closer to resignation (as a legitimate step toward faith)? Kierkegaard raises questions of infinite existential interest. But if his model faith-seeker wants only to be a curious or astounded onlooker, then faith is downgraded to cheap gawking, or to a set of impossible, irritating dialectical knots, at which the intellect plays.

Avoidance

The blindness of philosophers and theologians to Kierkegaard's maternal figures should be read against *masculine privileging* of death over birth, letting the end of life trump its beginning. The outcome is devaluation of children being brought into life, growing up into youth and independence under maternal nurture and tutelage. These have become sterile stereotypes of gender differentiation, yet they are also massive cultural facts.[15]

The evident blindness of readers to Kierkegaard's portraits of weaning parallels a general pattern of blindness in European literature and philosophy into the nineteenth century.[16] Males are depicted *as*, and in reality *are*, more powerful in public space than females – whether in politics, war, conquest, or in subjugation of any kind. "Ordinary family life," life out of the public sphere, was the stage for women's effectuality. Novels of family life flourished from Jane Austen on, but even here, accounts were incomplete. Tolstoy, in the late nineteenth century, must have been one of the first to depict the screaming press of childbirth, and to expose a father's agony at hearing it.[17]

The Odyssey introduces home life, a marriage bed, and a mother bidding her son farewell as he weans and wends from adolescence into maturity. But Penelope, who gave birth, neglects to speak of birth, even though the nurse who bathed Odysseus, reveals her intimacy with his childhood. Apart from Rousseau's *Emile*, philosophers write little about family or childhood until the advent of mid twentieth-century feminism.[18]

[15] For a general collection of feminist explications of "the" maternal, from a continental perspective, see Adams and Lundquist (2013). Thanks to Ada Jaarsma for this reference.

[16] See Mooney (1987). Claire Katz notes that "virility has been the dominant practice such that it is not just the history of events that privileges war; rather the very way we engage intellectually has given priority to death over life." Katz (2005), ch. 10.

[17] See Levin's anguished, helpless witness in a hallway outside a room where a child is being delivered in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Part Seven, XIII. Many editions.

[18] See Mooney (1987).

The first readers of *Fear and Trembling,* and most through to the present day, miss the appearance of mothers there. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers – with three or four notable exceptions – continue wearing blinders. Through 320 pages of the 1997 *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, the mothers are not mentioned once.[19] The bloody prospect of Isaac's *sacrifice* might blot out anything else, especially indecorous mothers; or the perverse shadow of mothers weaning might *itself* make the eye speed on past.

"*Fear and Trembling* will make my name immortal," Kierkegaard immodestly crows.[20] He banks on his imaginative ingenuity in bringing out the *full scandal* and *spectacle* of the Moriah affair, and banks on his dialectical finesse in causing the religious and the ethical to totter in precarious disharmony.[21] But there is a third moment in *Fear and Trembling* that on its own *ought* to have been sufficient to secure the author's immortality: the shocking instant he couples mother–infant to father–son, bringing the maternal center stage, and thus creating a multi-tiered instant that presides over a wedding of death and birth.

How to begin – and end

Births are beginnings. Tales of birth and rebirth have beginnings, sometimes troubled beginnings, halting beginnings, sometimes beginnings that barely get started and break off, unfinished. In this carnivalesque text, the mothers in "Attunement" are the first straightforwardly graspable figures of faith.[22] In any of her four partial incarnations, the weaning mother is far more comprehensible, morally and religiously speaking, than Abraham. As against blinding horror, we have an accessible, even banal, maternal scene. She must be *de silentio*'s stab at a *motherly* knight of faith.

The first two-fifths of *Fear and Trembling* – subtitled, a lyrical dialectic – comprises four discrete lyrical openings: no beginning is sufficient to the task; each takes us somewhere, but not to satisfying comprehension. The remaining three-fifths comprises three dialectical sections, opening with the mind-teasing question, "Can there be a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" Each dialectical venture is incomplete; none finishes the task in utter clarity. The lyrical and dialectical sections are framed by a prose

[19] Leon and Walsh (1997). [20] See KW 6, Supplement 257–58/JP 6, 6491, dated 1849.
[21] Of course if we promote Abraham as a Spectacle, we are not investigating faith.
[22] See Mooney (2012), pp. 175, 183.

preface and epilogue. Philosophers favor the dialectical sections; few writers get immersed in the lyrical openings. Why should this be?

It is as if dialectical conundrums are serious while lyric is kid's stuff. Could this be the resurfacing of gender assumptions – the sense that fairy tales are for mothers to read to kids, and philosophers have more serious business? Johannes begins "Attunement" in a fairy tale mood: "Once there was a man."[23] Romantic male poets are often characterized as feminine, as if sober, mature thinkers can only be distracted by images, parables, and lyrical excursions, fit for the child's room, but not for the scholar's study. We think only in propositions, it is assumed, never in pictures or parables or midrashim or ironic interjections. Kafka knew better, modeling an "Abraham Parable" on the early "Attunement" parables: one way to understand a parable is to tell another.[24] A vast secondary literature focuses on the dialectical question of the teleological suspensions ethics. Next to none focus on *de silentio*'s lyricism.[25]

The lyrical beginning sections are called, in Hannay's translation, "Attunement," "Praising Speech," and "Preamble from the Heart."[26] Each starts afresh from a different spot, in a different mood. It is as if restarts are demanded because previous attempts fail, or because failed attempts are the best we can do, or because multiple angles on the scene are required and we must forego the luxury of a single, stable reading. Everything morphs, dizzyingly.

These multiple resets act out a lesson: existential questioning of a critical life-moment outstrips ordinary cognitive capacities. We suffer false starts, and are forced to improvise new ones, ever-seeking cognitive resolution. Removing the ache for existential understanding is not a matter of finding puzzle pieces that await ordering and assembly. To live through an existential crisis is to weather a sounding and resounding of *who I am in my*

[23] As Climacus turns to a fairy tale-parable in *Philosophical Crumbs*, "The King and the Maiden," he warns that he may not be taken seriously, because he makes his points through a fairy tale. "Suppose there was a king who loved a maiden of lowly station in life – but the reader may already have lost patience when he hears that our analogy begins like a fairy tale and is not at all systematic." Kierkegaard (2009b), p. 102.

[24] Kafka warns that all books worth reading should "bite and sting . . . and strike us like a blow on the skull." See his letter to Oskar Pollak, 1904, quoted in Manguel (1997), p. 93. (For the epigraph, see Janouch 1971.)

[25] *Silentio* writes a dialectical lyric, knowing that the lyric is apt to conceal the dialectic, and conversely, the dialectic is apt to conceal the lyric.

[26] Hannay's "Attunement" is rendered by the Hongs as "Exordium"; his "Speech in Praise of Abraham" is rendered "Panygeric upon Abraham"; his "Preamble from the Heart" is the clumsy "Preliminary Expectoration."

situation, in both its lights and darks. Surviving a crisis is less a matter of finding an answer than, in the first place, resolving to pick that path out of it that minimizes painful residue (if there *be* any such path), and in the second, all the while acknowledging the eternal absence of any single correct reading of a piece of one's life, or a single correct assembly of its ambiguous pieces.[27] Overall, one must have the courage to move on despite this harrowing absence of ready-made solutions. One finds, or calls on, faith or courage to take the next step unashamedly despite inescapable cognitive opacities. *Silentio*'s variety of competing, incomplete, yet promising introductions is a stark reminder that *we do not already know* the meaning of that trip to Moriah, and may never know it fully. The rough places are *not* made plain; it is *not* a romance, boasting a happy ending.

Promising yet failing introductions force us to restart *from the beginning,* again and again. This instills a hard lesson. It is not obvious that the intervention that prevents Isaac's death provides peace, for it does not clarify the beginning, does not clarify the rationale for heavenly instigation of the ordeal. Each restart *comes to the tale for the first time*. Restarting does not increase the probabilities of success. It is futile to try to get a sense of our lives by rushing ahead to peek in on our death and last days – though we are tempted to see how it will all turn out. It is equally futile to try to get a sense of our lives by falling back to peek in at our birth and early years – though we are tempted, and try. Our lives are ambiguous and never fully plotted, and *de silentio* indirectly instills this wisdom. When restarts of the trip to Moriah are embellished with discordant mother–infant images, the incomplete plotting is doubled and tripled.[28]

Improvisations

Whether the story is of *our* lives-in-the-making, or is instead, *Abraham's* story – stories we so often think we know inside out – the task of repeated retelling is not fruitless. We learn from less than complete stories, from stories under revision, and from 'double stories' of the sort we find with the juxtapositions of fathers and mothers. The series of mothers weaning a child whisper that it is *her* trial at issue, as if mothers are candidate knights

[27] We can speak of these always-incomplete tellings and retellings as articulations of self, as choosing of a self, or expressions or exposures of self. For links between subjectivity and exposure, and the hazards of self-deception in this forging, reception, or exposure of oneself, see Mooney (2012), chs. 1, 2, and 4.

[28] We have something like a decorated set of Russian dolls, each wooden figure opening up to reveal another *smaller* one within, with no end in sight.

of faith.[29] And from the other side, the mothers whisper that *Abraham* is *weaning Isaac* (not killing him). A mother with a blackened breast might underlie the dark image of Abraham. He becomes father–mother, holding the infant with a raised blade. And we might even sense that God is *weaning* Abraham (not destroying him).[30]

Perhaps the primal whispered drama here is an "ordeal of love and separation":[31]

> The framework of mother and child is not an outcropping of anomalous imagery. It reinforces *Fear and Trembling*'s fundamental themes. To achieve *independence-in-relationship*, separation that simultaneously acknowledges profound dependence is the exacting project of Kierkegaardian selfhood.[32]

If this is correct, we have a two-track story of individuation:[33]

> When the child is to be weaned the mother blackens her breast, for it would be a shame were the breast to look pleasing when the child is not to have it. So the child believes that the breast has changed but the mother is the same, her look [is] loving and tender as ever. Lucky the one that needed no more terrible means to wean the child![34]

The mother's 'deceives' the child – her breast is not 'really' ('naturally') black; she hides the fact that she *makes* it black. She is not 'really' rejecting him. These deceptions echo Abraham's pretending that *he is insane* and *wants* Isaac dead. (But putting Isaac to the knife really *is* God's idea, not Abraham's.[35]) Later, toward the end of *Fear and Trembling*, the merman, facing Agnes, will also plunge into pretense and deception.

Concealment, deception, and lying become attractive if not inevitable when a surplus of unmanageable interpretative meanings–possibilities obtrudes. As Dan Conway notes, Kierkegaard is fascinated with the regions *between* ethical, religious, and aesthetic life-spheres, where distinct guidelines ("never deceive," "always obey God") disappear, even as adequate comprehension of the situation disappears. One might opt for an otherwise forbidden deception because this will pare down interpretative ambiguity. Is the mother cruel or kind? We can say "*both*." But *she* cannot stomach this (nor can the infant, nor can average spectators). So she hides half of her

[29] See Mooney (1991). [30] Mooney (2012), p. 177. [31] Mooney (1991), p. 30. [32] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[33] Commentators link the sacrifice of Isaac to Kierkegaard's break with (sacrifice of) Regina. Our interest here is in the philosophical significance of these passages.
[34] FT 11/SKS 4, 107–08.
[35] In both cases, Linda Williams notes, an adult puts on a pretense for the good of the child. Williams (1998), pp. 310–18, 313.

situation, hides her causing the infant pain. She promotes a simplified (and deceptive) face to her weaning. Is Abraham Godly – or a Madman? For Isaac, and many others, probably both. In the early version of events, Abraham hides his faithfulness, simplifying conflict in interpretation by presenting himself as a madman.

The mother will not want to harm her infant, and conceals that possibility by hiding the breast (as a remembrance of loss) and showing her face (as a remembrance of love). This models the intermixed separation and dependence that fosters love. The infant is neither utterly swallowed by the mother's continued presence nor utterly abandoned by the mother's definitive absence.

The second mother presents a less successful attempt at weaning:

> When the child has grown and is to be weaned the mother virginally covers her breast, so the child no more has a mother. Lucky the child that lost its mother in no other way![36]

This second retelling depends on our having absorbed the second Abraham, who loses faith. "From that day on, Abraham became old, he could not forget that God had demanded this from him."[37] Abraham loses God, and Isaac loses a virile Abraham. The child loses a mother as she "virginally" detaches her body from her child. This child is lucky, *silentio* says, compared to Isaac, even though "the child has no more a mother."[38]

Here is improvisation number three:

> When the child is to be weaned the mother too is not without sorrow, that she and the child grow more and more apart; that the child which first lay beneath her heart, yet later rested at her breast, should no longer be so close. Thus together they suffer this brief sorrow. Lucky the one who kept the child so close and had no need to sorrow more![39]

Both the mother and the child suffer separation, but their sorrow, Kierkegaard suggests, is brief. Maybe the fact that their suffering is mutual is what makes it brief. *Their* separation does *not* require concealment, in contrast to versions one and two. Shared grief enables them to sustain a truer, more promising relationship.

The mother prior to weaning is a mother–child hybrid, not individuated sufficiently for mature love. The infant, for its part, is incapable of human dialogue or love – largely a creature of bodily, "animal" needs. The mother, too, is a creature of bodily capacities. At risk in the weaning is not

[36] FT 12/SKS 4, 109. [37] *Ibid.* [38] Perhaps the infant's fright is less debilitating than Isaac's.
[39] FT 13/SKS 4, 110.

a relation between two full humans, but a relation between a near-human nurturer and a suckling.

The fourth and last version falls under Abraham drawing the knife, but with a shaking hand: seeing it, "Isaac had lost his faith."[40] Lost faith in God, in his father, or both? An unsteady paternal hand is not trustworthy; it does not inspire confidence.[41]

There are repetitive reopenings in *Fear and Trembling* clustered in fours: four "introductions" prior to the start of the dialectical sections; four miniature retellings of the *Akedah* paired with four weaning mothers (who might be four Sarahs – or even Sarah, Leah, Rebecca, and Rachael). Multiple reopenings reenact multiple reopenings of life. Reopening is *release into life,* which is the *telos* of nursing, weaning, and maternal care. Life ends in death. It starts in birth and in endless reopenings or rebirths.

Parallels in *The Symposium*

We can pair our explorations of the maternal, femininity, and birth in *Fear and Trembling* with Plato's explorations of these in *The Symposium*.[42] This comparison across centuries and cultures will highlight the presence of poetry, hybridity, and gender.

Music, poetry, and tragedy

Eryximachus has offhandedly dismissed one of only two female characters in the dialogue, the flute-girl.[43] *Talking* – poetically, but also scientifically and philosophically – replaces music. Flutes are for light entertainment.[44] Worse, the flute, or *aulos*, has exceptional powers of emotional arousal and uproar.[45] The dialogue closes with the drunken, erotic, uproar of Alcibiades' arrival. He is "accompanied by the shrieks of some flute-girl they had brought along,"[46] and he alludes to the eroticism of "the greatest flautist" and "the meanest flute-girl,"[47] even as he laments his failure to arouse Socrates.

The flute-girl raises the possibility – quickly withdrawn – that music might accompany poetry and philosophy. Johannes *de silentio* had allowed

[40] *Ibid.* [41] For a detailed discussion see Williams (1998), p. 315.
[42] The *Symposium* is about *Eros*. *Fear and Trembling*, it seems, is a book about faith, and faith is "the highest passion in a human being" (FT 122/SKS 4, 209). So both books are about passion, and love: 'The young swain in love with his princess' is key to the discussion of passion.
[43] Plato (1997), 176e.
[44] Elsewhere, flute playing is considered to belong with "childish frivolities." *Protagoras*, 347d.
[45] *Ibid.*, 497, n. 50. [46] *Ibid.*, 212c. [47] *Ibid.*, 215c.

a mix of philosophy and poetry, penning a "*lyrical dialectic*." Although usually against any such mix, here Plato slyly allows them to couple. Agathon (poetry) *competes* with (Socrates) philosophy.[48] Will Socrates win? Who will judge? "*Dionysus* will soon enough be the judge of our claims to wisdom!"[49] Alcibiades enters as Dionysus and crowns *both* Socrates *and* Agathon.[50] Like Kierkegaard, Plato refuses to let dialectic dominate. Philosophy dances with an erotic and poetic partner, refusing to be pruned back to a delivery of static essences.

A merman's hybridity

The merman is an animal–human, while Socrates is divine–human. The hybrid in both cases has an advantage over the purebred. Animals escape existential crisis in relying on instinct, while divinities escape it because they are exempt from death – an exemption that depletes life's urgency. Having a god on one's shoulder, or instinct in one's gut, suspends *ethical* angst – it is suspended as long as one lives exclusively as *either* one's lower- *or* upper-persona. As long as the merman is exclusively fish of the sea, he will act on instinct without worry. As long as Socrates is exclusively in god's heaven, he cannot but be ethical, and will be without angst. Neither animals nor gods can betray a fallible moral sense, or fail ethical imperatives to *know* oneself or to *choose* oneself.[51] Alcibiades accuses Socrates of joining a godlike capacity to *resist* seduction with a very human power to seduce. (Of course if we are banal intra-human hybrids – male–female, for instance – we will not elude ethical angst.) Socrates and the merman mark a space half way between angels and fish, and help to illuminate human complexity.

Here is *silentio* on Agnes and the merman:

> The merman . . . has called out to Agnes, with his smooth talk has coaxed from her, her secret thoughts. She has found in the merman what she was seeking, what she gazed down to find in the depths of the sea. Agnes is willing to follow him down. The merman has taken her into his arms,

[48] Given Plato's repute for hostility toward poetry – after all, he seems to exile it from the City in *The Republic* – we might assume Socrates will emerge the clear victor in this contest. But Plato's *own* poetry is not exiled: he has a place for image and myth and parable. Though he is suspicious of the tragedians, in *The Symposium* he floats the possibility of speech that *combines* tragedy and comedy: so tragedy cannot be *all* bad.

[49] *Symposium*, 176A. [50] *Ibid.*, 212e, 213e; See also Lev-Kenaan and Kenaan (2001), 127 [Hebrew].

[51] Socrates passes on an imperative, "Know thyself," but is not subject to it himself. As the full embodiment of self-knowledge, he is not charged to attain it.

> Agnes twines hers about his neck trustingly and with all her soul she abandons herself to the stronger one. He is already at the sea-edge, bending over the water to dive down with his prey. Then Agnes looks at him again, not fearfully, not questioningly, not proud of her good luck, not intoxicated with desire, but in absolute faith, with absolute humility, like the humble flower she deemed herself to be; with absolute confidence she entrusts to him her entire fate.—And look! The ocean roars no more, its wild voice is stilled, nature's passion—which is the merman's strength—deserts him, the sea becomes dead calm . . . Then the merman collapses, he is unable to resist the power of innocence, his element becomes unfaithful to him, he cannot seduce Agnes. He leads her home again, he explains to her that he only wanted to show her how beautiful the sea is when it is calm, and Agnes believes him.[52]

Does the merman want to become purebred human in coupling Agnes? If so, he loses her precisely because he is not. He cannot bear to reveal himself, to be open, to be without secrets, to be pure. If he were stuck with his sea-monster side, he would be *free from choosing* among possibilities, and would rely on ravishing instinct. But he is neither pure monster nor pure human:

> The merman is a seducer, but when he has won Agnes's love he is so moved by it that he wants to belong to her entirely. – But this, you see, he cannot do, since he must initiate her into his whole tragic existence, that he is a monster at certain times, etc., that the church cannot give its blessing to them. He despairs and in his despair plunges to the bottom of the sea.[53]

The merman cannot absorb Agnes' lesson, that love is utter trust, is complete faith. He retreats from love and retreats from seduction. He tries, but fails, to *wean* himself from his animality and become human. What if the mother tried to wean her infant, to whom she is instinctually attached – but for lack of trust, failed, and so plunged into despair, abandoning the child. Should Alcibiades wean himself from animal lust?

We have here a series of *conundra*: what is faith for a mother or for Abraham or for Agnes or for a merman? What is love for Socrates, for Aristophanes, for Alcibiades, for Diotima? In teaching and depicting love and faith why do mixed-gender hybrids or beings half human/half animal, or half human/half divinity come to dominate the stage? Just as *de silentio*

[52] FT 94/SKS 4, 183–84. [53] JP 5, 5668; Mooney (2008), p. 176.

must begin again and again, so we seem to be condemned to yet further and further layers of ignorance and illumination.

Pervasive hybridity

We have *Socrates–Satyr*, *Socrates–silenus*, *Socrates–god–man,* and as we will see in a moment, *Socrates-Diotima*. We have merman as fish–man, and mothers as mother–infants. Hybridity is a tensed dynamic of ontologically disparate parts. A hybrid's melding and morphing is rich anthropologically because it defeats static binarism, hierarchy, and non-fluid proportionality. Through figuring excess more abundant and fruitful than either of its component parts taken separately, or simply aggregated, a hybrid figures new (and wild) possibilities for being. The downside to this liberating dynamic of abundance is the havoc it plays with our conceptual expectations. We want something to be *either* a god *or* a mortal, not both; *either* a goat *or* a person, not both; *either* a mother *or* an infant, not both. Hybrids morph and blur on the edge of vertigo and incoherence. Can we have freedom from typecasting without paying the price in anxiety at excessive ambiguity?

For Plato, Eros is an ambiguous hybrid, fullness-and-lack. Kierkegaard is the hybrid Kierkegaard–*de silentio*, and Johannes becomes old-man-with-fairy tale. The book is lyric–dialectic. Hybridity is a dynamic marriage of contrasts or opposites, as in Blake's marriage of heaven and hell, as in meldings of spirit–body; body–soul; reason–emotion; sacred–secular; living–dead. It unglues the stability of singular identities and taxes both imagination and living, for we live with goat–men, men–gods, nursing-fathers and mother–Abrahams. Hybrids teach by inviting perceptual aspect-shift and freedom-to-change. Socrates stirs the possibility of Socrates–satyr. He teases imagination, a bristling freedom that features the *transcendence* of commonplace categories. I imagine myself as rich–poor, WASP–Jew, dialectical–lyricist. Hybrids unglue single-core identities and feature freedom as self-modulation rather than socio-political achievement. They blur static maps of simple identities. Yet original identity is preserved, paradoxically, in the morphed hybrid identity. Though not *simply* Socrates (as he becomes Socrates–satyr), Socrates *remains* Socrates (now a complex Socrates). Mother remains mother even as she morphs *out* of the hybrid mother–infant.[54]

[54] Perhaps like Wittgenstein's duck–rabbit, Socrates, for others, is simple interrogator, then satyr; Isaac is Isaac-Abraham's-seed, Isaac-burnt-offering, and Isaac-returned-from-God.

Socrates

Alcibiades opens the last great speech in the *Symposium*:

> I'll try to praise Socrates, my friends, but I'll have to use an image. And though he may think I'm trying to make fun of him, I assure you my image is no joke: it aims at the truth. Look at him! Isn't he just like a statue of Silenus? You know the kind of statue I mean; you'll find them in any shop in town. It's a Silenus sitting, his flute or his pipes in his hands, and it's hollow. It's split right down the middle, and inside it's full of tiny statues of the gods. Now look at him again! Isn't he also just like the satyr Marsyas?[55]

Socrates is a satyr, half man/half animal, and also full of gods. This is close to Diotima's description of *Eros* as half-man, half-god:

> As the son of Poros and Penia, his lot in life is set to be like theirs. In the first place, he is always poor, and he's far from being delicate and beautiful (as ordinary people think he is); instead, he is tough and shriveled and shoeless and homeless, always lying on the dirt without a bed, sleeping at people's doorsteps and in roadsides under the sky, having his mother's nature, always living with Need. But on his father's side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom through all his life, a genius with enchantments, potions, and clever pleadings.

Eros escapes the simple categories mortal–immortal, human–divine:

> He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal. But now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies—all in the very same day. Because he is his father's son, however, he keeps coming back to life, but then anything he finds his way to always slips away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich. He is in between wisdom and ignorance as well.[56]

As both god and mediator, Eros becomes Socrates. Irigaray elaborates:

> [But] one should not have to give up love in order to become wise or learned. It is love that leads to knowledge, whether in art or more metaphysical learning. It is love that both leads the way and is the path. A mediator par excellence.[57]

[55] *The Symposium*, 215b. [56] *Ibid.*, 203c–204a.

[57] Irigaray (1993), p. 21. Irigaray links hybridity and Eros: Eros is "neither mortal nor immortal. He is between the one and the other, in a state that can be qualified as daimonic: love is a *daimon*. A being of middle nature is needed so that men and gods can enter into relations, into conversation." See pp. 21–23.

Agnes

Agnes is the only woman with *agency* in *Fear and Trembling*. With her faithfulness and innocence, she changes the merman forever.[58] He does not seduce her, he *cannot* seduce her, and thus, he starts to feel guilty for wanting to, and to feel guilty for all the girls he has seduced. Here the second phase of the love story begins. Now the merman can *stay* in his demonic position, a seducer at heart; repent and *resign* Agnes, or repent and *keep* Agnes:

> If he stays hidden and dedicates himself to all the torments of repentance [suffering his guilt but not revealing it], he becomes a demon, and as such is brought to nothing. If he stays hidden but entertains no clever thoughts about being able to extricate Agnes . . . he will no doubt find peace but is lost to the world. If he discloses himself, lets himself be saved through Agnes, then he is the greatest human being I can imagine.[59]

Each of the possibilities has a price, including the last one – because becoming a man means relinquishing his animal part. But we should note that it is Agnes who actually provides the merman with future possibilities. She enables him to transcend his present finitude, whether or not he avails himself of this chance. He can choose to reveal himself and shed his sensuousness.

Diotima

Diotima, the priestess of love, speaks not just about love, but to *learning* about love. But *how* is Diotima so well informed? We might try a startling proposal. Perhaps she is a theatrical convention, a womanly mask through which Socrates speaks. But why can Socrates not speak directly, dropping the tall tale of meeting a priestess who teaches him? David Halperin opens a discussion of this issue by noting that it is as if "Diotima is better informed about the desires of men than are men themselves . . . It takes a woman to reveal men to themselves."[60]

But why do men need a woman to teach them about love? Perhaps they cannot bear to hear the truth from another man, cannot hear of the weakness, the *vulnerability,* that love demands. It is frightening to hear a man speak of his weakness, but perhaps it is not as frightening

[58] See note 59, below. [59] FT 99/SKS 4, 189. [60] Halperin (1989), p. 113.

to hear it from a loving or appreciative woman. Socrates *needs* an appreciative woman to teach him and his male companions. And she has to be extraordinary if her teaching – teaching *Socrates*, no less – is to be credible. As Socrates tells it, she *is* extraordinary, and he vindicates that judgment by letting her turn the tables on him. She gets to interrogate *him* – and gets away with it. She keeps him spellbound. He takes on the role of the ignorant, star-struck pupil. Yet, as Halperin continues:

> Once we admit the possibility that there may be more to being a woman than not being a man, we are obliged to seek for *positive* reasons behind Plato's startling decision to introduce a woman into the clannish, masculine society of Agathon's household in order to enlighten a group of articulate paederasts about the mysteries of erotic desire.[61]

Notice Diotima's metaphor of procreation: "Love . . . is giving birth in the beautiful, in respect of body and of soul."[62] Halperin concludes:

> Diotima's gender, then, is not a merely peripheral fact or an accidental circumstance, unconnected to her teaching; it is, apparently, a condition of her discourse, and it is inscribed in what she says.[63]

As a woman, she can speak of giving birth through the body – love as generative through giving birth in the beautiful in respect of the body – and she can speak with an authority no male could. A feminist might applaud the appearance of a woman strong and wise enough to teach Socrates on these matters, but she might also take exception to the *message*. As her speech proceeds, Diotima seems to envisage ultimate love as several steps *above* a person's love of a particular body. Is she (is Socrates) consistent here? And what about Diotima's suggestion that giving birth to an actual baby is *inferior* to a male's acts of *spiritual* creation? But before faulting the message, consider the audience.

Diotima addresses men who as a matter of brute biology will never be able to give birth to actual babies – so the message is *appropriate to the audience*. Let them aspire to effect spiritual birth; it is better than barrenness. Showing a different imagination, *de silentio* lets the faithful "give birth to their own fathers," and elsewhere avers, "when the child has rested long enough at the mother's breast *it is laid at the father's*, and he too nourishes it with his flesh and blood."[64]

[61] *Ibid.* [62] *Symposium*, 206b. [63] Halperin (1989), p. 117.
[64] Kierkegaard (2004), p. 420; trans: KW 4, 72 (our emphasis).

Having only a broken knowledge of woman's ways of birthing, males will look toward a mother or woman for understanding what, in their own case, spiritual pregnancy or birth might mean. Males will suppose a woman has better clues to further birth than any man will. Thus Socrates recruits Diotima for his purposes, even when the birth in question is spiritual. Yet having Diotima preside brings on ambivalence. Men are denied the power of physical birthing. Thus they both long for women's power and target them in envy and anger. In this maelstrom of emotion, it is a stroke of genius for Plato to invent the hybrid Socrates–Diotima. Through their love of Socrates, a male audience can imagine giving birth, especially as he morphs into Socrates-wise-priestess. If *he* lets a woman instruct him, get inside him, then *they* can let Socrates–Diotima instruct or get inside *them*. Plato thereby instills his vision.

Diotima holds Socrates at bay, removing his sting – no one else is ever allowed to question him, to show up his ignorance, to sting *him*. One knows love through its sting – and we might suppose this holds not only for romantic love but also for nurturing mother love, generative love, as well. Socrates can report, now, that love is the *only* thing of which he has knowledge. A feminine–masculine hybridity crashes the philosopher's party to break down the barriers against knowing love. All this, as we have seen, mimics the woman–manly hybridity that invades the crisis of love and separation on Moriah. We have Abraham as Abraham–mother, Mother as mother–Abraham; we have Socrates as Socrates–Diotima, Diotima as Diotima-Socrates.

Men and love

For Plato, wisdom can only be delivered by the wisest of men – from *Socrates*. But Socrates must be *feminized* for the task. He must be a midwife, and males learn of generative love through accessing a woman's art of giving birth – an access facilitated by a half-woman. Womanly arts are called on because a male does not in the first instance give birth through his loins or nurture the new birth at his breasts, so his access to generative love is ordinarily blocked. For intimate knowledge of giving birth and nurturing, a woman must step forth.

Compare the case of Abraham. To bring forward the role of love in faith (not wisdom, in this case), *de silentio* lets Abraham merge with a weaning mother – as if a mother is needed to instruct Abraham in matters of nursing, love, nurturing, and separation. That a father can become a woman is confirmed by the passage just noted: "when the child has rested

long enough at the mother's breast *it is laid at the father's*, and he too nourishes it with his flesh and blood."[65]

Generally speaking, we can suppose that a male's aversion to birth, nurturing, and generative love – hence a male philosopher's aversion to it as a topic of discussion – arises from several quarters. There is the lack of *power* to give birth. This challenges a male's aspiration to autonomy and control. He must *depend* on a mother (and dependency is a vice).[66] Aversion may also arise as a male imagines or witnesses the dramatic entrance of life through the birth canal – a wonder and terror simultaneously. Then there is ignorance of the subtle fluidity of early growth, from birth through weaning through infancy in its many subtle permutations. And there is a more general anxiety, the oft-cited anxiety about impregnation. A would-be autonomous male can ask (in a way a mother cannot) – *Is the new infant really mine?*

Our hypothesis is that one way or another, this multi-layered aversion is either caused by (or causes) an obsession with securing fixed and essential identities, actually and conceptually. Identity must be non-fluid, non-hybrid, and focused on the unchangeable hard fate of death. If anything like this hypothesis is true, it is a miracle that Plato and Kierkegaard break the mold, giving full expression to a female voice that tolerates fluidity, and foregoes vaunting power.

Plato has Diotima enter the discussion of love, for several interrelated reasons. By virtue of gender alone, she embodies plasticity, fluidity, growth-through-unexpected-possibilities – characteristics that are the daily fare in a mother's giving birth and nurturing infants. Philosophizing males need a dramatic celebration of femininity-and-procreation and she stages it.[67] Urging males to picture giving birth to themselves (of necessity, a non-physical birth) is much more plausible coming from Diotima than from a male, or from Socrates. Since the focus is not only on sex but on generative love, Diotima becomes a counterweight to an exclusively lusty, this-worldly Eros – the sort embodied by Alcibiades, who appears after her speech. (Socrates is sometimes criticized for his abstinence, seen as a denigration of the bodily per se. But perhaps his chastity here is less an ideal for all and all time than a necessary rebuke to the immoderate Alcibiades, a sexual exhibitionist.) Males will learn of love, it seems, through letting their own

[65] *Ibid.* [66] See Mooney (2013a).

[67] Cavarero suggests that when Socrates wants to talk about love and speaks as a woman, this role-playing is a kind of theater – Socrates impersonating Diotima, letting his own thoughts arrive through the mask of another. Cavarero (1995), 191ff. Thus the quip that Diotima is Socrates in drag.

ambiguities, ambivalences, and hybridities arise and percolate. Diotima–Socrates can excite just this tolerance of ambiguity.

There is gender doubleness at the heart of Plato's discussion of love, just as there is gender doubleness at the center of *de silentio*'s lyrics. Diotima must 'talk like a man,' assertive and self-possessed, to Socrates. Socrates must 'talk like a woman,' and defer to Diotima.[68] Alcibiades, the manliest of warriors, talks with the hysteria of a spurned woman. Johannes *de silentio* requires love or faith to be experienced from a patriarch tempting cruelty and then from a tender mother risking harm to her infant.[69] Teaching love models fluid transitions from union-to-separation-to-union, as Abraham is weaned from God, and as a mother weans her infant – all the while preserving love. As Gillian Rose puts it, each instance of love retains just enough separateness and togetherness to allow "love to suspire." To have faithful love, as *de silentio* shows, is to breathe amidst opposites.[70]

Of course in these interpretative philosophical explorations we are moving amidst great mysteries. Lovers are best when intensely linked *and* unlinked to the other. How can that be? And no *ordinary* speech can convey the inordinate recklessness of love's reality. The best poetry or dialectic makes a stab, yet only a stab. Words and acts of love come from an angel, a god, a Diotima, a madman, perhaps even an Abraham, a simple mother, an Agnes or a Merman – words and acts linked and unlinked to the commonplace humanity of discourse and the realities in which it is immersed. Love calls on an ordinary mortal through shadowy mists in shadowy words to become half something else. We seek and resist.[71]

Of woman born – a hermeneutic of love

We are temporal creatures who think of ourselves as creatures that die, whose time on this planet is limited. We are orientated toward endings, but also continually toward vital beginnings. And we undergo transitions that we survive, transitions of growth, not just transitions toward the ultimate completion of life at death. We are creatures toward death and

[68] And it is not only fluid genders that make identity fluid: Socrates must be experienced as half satyr *and* as Silenus, containing gods within. He must be erotic *and* personally impervious and cold.

[69] It would take another chapter to trace the interweaving of love and faith in *Fear and Trembling*. It is our view that *de silentio* – or Kierkegaard – chooses so many instances of romantic attachment to illustrate faith because faith and love overlap in so many interesting ways.

[70] Anti-Climacus writes, "Without possibility it is as if one cannot draw breath." See Kierkegaard (1989), p. 69.

[71] Cavarero (1995) argues that this is a necessary device because a woman could not participate in the symposium – an all-male drinking and talking feast.

creatures *from* birth and creatures ever in passage *to* rebirth, caught up in lives (children, parents, siblings, friends) that penetrate and animate ours. The feminine and maternal, the multi-valance of love and hybridity, remind us of our immersion in ambiguous, complex lives that call us not just through pure or practical reason but through imaginative interpretation and acknowledgment of inter-animation, to align our lives in subtler, more loving ways, as in a new beginning.[72]

Only a dismal portrait of philosophy excludes the feminine and the maternal, exiles love and becoming, privileges the finalities of death over the potentials of birth. It is instructive to see that even Plato, head of an all-male club, and one whom many see as setting a standard for dismissing flux and bodily nurture – even *he* brings the feminine into the heart of the Socratic venture.

The Socratic venture was Kierkegaard's too, and as we have seen he, no less than Plato, feels the pull of the necessarily maternal and feminine. He includes it in his stunning interpretations of that most terrifying and recalcitrant of biblical scenarios, the tale Johannes *de silentio* pursues in *Fear and Trembling,* from the maternal Abraham-counterparts to the complex romance of Agnes and the merman.

We can uncover in *Fear and Trembling* and the *Symposium* philosophy that raises the issue of its own relation to the feminine and rejects the presumption, voiced or unvoiced, that the feminine and love corrupt the philosopher's business and life – not to mention their pursuit of the rationally satisfying life. This should be welcome news. The feminine, love, and maternal seem increasingly acknowledged in contemporary philosophical writing. Hybridity, too, has emerged as an alternative to an obsession with singular essential identities.

Socrates looks up and away from the body, but also, as we have seen, he looks down and in toward the body, living out an identity half-goat half-person, half-divinity half-human, half-male half-Diotima. Just so, Kierkegaard has *de silentio* look up at the horror of Abrahams on Moriah, and then down at nursing mothers, each a parable of the other. And *de silentio* at last leaves his tales of Abrahams stolidly grappling up Moriah with an unexpected new tale. We are given the arresting and complex tale of Agnes and the merman, a midrash on Abraham, Isaac, mother, and infant. Following such blurred, tempering, and sometimes biting improvisations, we become more attuned to what lies beyond Moriah, or beneath its shadow – a landscape more human and humane.

[72] See, on that matter, Mooney (2007), ch. 5.

CHAPTER 10

Narrative unity and the moment of crisis in Fear and Trembling

Anthony Rudd

A familiar and still influential image of Kierkegaard presents him as an irrationalist; someone who supposes that transitions between evaluative frameworks such as the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious can only be made by blind "leaps of faith," acts of will for which no reasons can be given. More recent interpretations of Kierkegaard as a narrative theorist have, I think, successfully challenged this understanding of Kierkegaard's view of the ethical, but they might seem to leave the irrationalist interpretation of his view of religious faith – particularly as presented in *Fear and Trembling* – untouched. In this chapter I will argue that faith in *Fear and Trembling* does have a narrative intelligibility of a kind that is at least partially continuous with that of the ethical life.[1] But I will need to start with a brief explanation of what I mean by narrative intelligibility in the ethical context.

I

Alasdair MacIntyre, who has given one of the more sophisticated versions of the irrationalist reading of Kierkegaard, argues that, according to Kierkegaard, transitions between evaluative frameworks must occur as "criterionless choices," since they are choices of what will count as being reasons or criteria for actions or choices, and so cannot themselves be governed by (rational) criteria.[2] In the last two or three decades, many Kierkegaard scholars have reacted against such interpretations, arguing in particular that Kierkegaard presents the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical in *Either/Or* as a rational one. And some of us have argued that, ironically, the account that Kierkegaard has Judge William in *Either/Or* give of the ethical

[1] I should say that this is in part a retraction. In Rudd (1993), ch. 4, I argued that faith lacks the narrative structure which ethics does have.

[2] MacIntyre (2007), pp. 39–43.

life and its rationality is very similar to the account MacIntyre himself gives in his *After Virtue*.[3]

MacIntyre's aim in that book was to revive an Aristotelian approach to ethics, according to which human life has a goal (*telos*) which is the achievement of happiness (*eudaimonia*). This consists in the proper fulfillment of our distinctive potentials as human beings (rational animals). Our actions are intelligible because they aim at some good which it makes (some) sense for us to desire. This good may contribute to our overall good/happiness; or it may be some lesser good that may distract from or hinder the achievement of our true good. But either way, according to MacIntyre, an action is intelligible because it can be situated in a wider narrative. This is because a narrative, as distinct from a mere chronicle (a listing of events in chronological order) makes sense of an agent's intentional activities by showing what they were intended to bring about, and why the agent could reasonably, given those circumstances, have formed those intentions.[4] But we cannot understand an action without understanding the agent who performed it, and we can only understand an agent by understanding the narrative of that agent's development through time. My sense of who I am, my sense of my own identity, is given by the story I can tell about myself – to myself as well as to others. And it is crucial to MacIntyre's argument that we do not just tell stories (retrospectively) about our lives; we live our lives *as* narratives. I am, to some extent, the author of my own life; and I am attempting to shape it in a certain direction, toward the realization of certain goals, in a way that is intelligible in the light of its past history.

This account of a human life as an enacted narrative in which a person strives to realize his or her good is strikingly similar to the way that Judge William presents the ethical life in *Either/Or*. The ethical person, whose life is structured by commitments to what he or she takes to have real value, lives his or her life as having a consistency or unity across time. So the life of Judge William appears as a narrative – not just as a series of episodes, but also as having a trajectory, a direction, a meaning, in which the present is linked back to the past and directed toward the future. And this is not just a story *we* can tell about him; his own sense of himself as an

[3] See Davenport and Rudd (2001); also Rudd (1993), ch. 3. For recent Kierkegaard-inspired defences of ethical narrativity see Davenport (2012) and Rudd (2012).

[4] It is worth noting that the intentions in question need not be conscious ones. As a number of both philosophers and psychoanalytic practitioners have argued, psychoanalytic explanations, appealing as they do to unconscious intentions, desires, and so on are still essentially narrative in form. On this see Rudd (2012), ch. 9.

agent, acting in meaningful ways, depends on his having this sense of narrative unity in his life. He consciously takes responsibility for making it into an intelligible progression toward the realization of recognizable goods. This is true up to a point even for most aesthetes; but the goods they strive for – social conformity, pleasure, power, etc. – are at best partial goods. To think only in such terms (not to see those values in a broader or richer context) is to fail to recognize what the true good for us is – what a flourishing human life could and should be. And this failure is not an accidental or innocent one. Kierkegaard thinks of the aesthete as characteristically someone who is repressing an awareness of his or her *telos* – while also of course repressing the awareness that he or she is doing that. And this means that the true narrative of that person's life cannot be told from that person's own perspective.

"A," the Judge's main antagonist from *Either/Or*, is a particularly sophisticated and self-aware aesthete. Refusing to pursue long-term goals, he therefore refuses to see his past as having any binding meaning for him, or his future as having any teleological significance for him. Hence he claims that "Not until hope has been thrown overboard does one begin to live artistically" and that "No part of life ought to have so much meaning for a person that he cannot forget it any moment he wants to."[5] (In sharp contrast, Judge William writes, "The healthy individual lives simultaneously in hope and in recollection and only thereby does his life gain true and substantive continuity."[6]) But although "A" claims to lack any long-term sense of his past as being significant for his present actions, or of those present actions as being meaningful through contributing to long-term goals he cares about, still, as an agent, he cannot help having *some* grasp of temporal structure – he does *this* so he can do *that* in order to achieve *this*. And *this* must be something that makes some sense as a goal for him to have chosen. In fact "A" *is* acting for overriding values which give a structure to his life – his apparently erratic and inconsistent behavior is really expressive of a deeper commitment to certain ideals of freedom and control. So there is more of a sense of narrative structure in his life than he is willing to admit to himself; and an ideal of the good, as well. But it is a narrow and inadequate ideal – one that prevents him from enjoying the goods of commitment and lasting relationships. Hence what Judge

[5] Kierkegaard (1987) pp. 292–93/SKS 2, 282. "Forgetting" here does not of course mean consigning to literal oblivion, but the ability to assign whatever significance one wishes to past events, and thus to treat them as important or not according to whim.

[6] KW 3, 142/SKS 3, 140.

William is really doing in *Either/Or* is not urging "A" to make a criterionless choice of the ethical life, but trying to recall him to a deeper sense of the good – and of the need to organize his life around the quest for that good – that he cannot simply be unaware of, but which he is attempting to repress. And because it directs him toward his true good, the ethical life is *rational* for "A" (or anyone else) to choose.[7]

These narrativist readings of Kierkegaard have been challenged in various ways.[8] But even those who agree that Judge William's ethics in *Either/Or* has a narrative structure – and the distinctive sort of rationality that goes with it – might doubt that Kierkegaard's account of religion can be seen in that way.[9] In particular, *Fear and Trembling* presents an apparently exemplary figure, Abraham, who seems to actively defy understanding in narrative terms. Central to his sense of himself is that he is a father – and not just a father, but also the recipient of God's promise that his descendants will become a great nation. But by taking Isaac to Mount Moriah to kill him, he is, apparently, throwing away everything that gives his life meaning:

> Now everything would be lost! The glorious remembrance of posterity, the promise in Abraham's seed, was only a whim, a passing thought of the Lord's, which Abraham now must obliterate. That glorious treasure . . . the fruit of Abraham's life, dedicated by prayer, ripened in combat . . . this fruit would now be plucked prematurely and be without meaning. (FT 16/SKS 4, 116)[10]

On the MacIntyrean picture, one explains actions teleologically; one tells a story that shows how doing this thing now can be seen as furthering some project that the agent is intelligibly engaged in, bringing about some goal that the agent could be seen as intelligibly desiring.[11] But Abraham's action seems teleologically incomprehensible; it seems to make nonsense of his whole life up to that point. This is not just a new and unexpected

[7] This is, of course, a very schematic account of the confrontation between the aesthetic and the ethical; for more detail, see Rudd (2012), pp. 70–77, 167–73.

[8] See, in particular, Lippitt (2007).

[9] As I did in Rudd (1993), ch. 4; for a more recent argument of this kind, see Stokes' interesting paper (2010) – though Stokes refers mainly to *Sickness Unto Death*, rather than *Fear and Trembling*.

[10] All references to *Fear and Trembling* are indicated in the text by "FT" followed by the page number of the Cambridge edition: S. Kierkegaard, ed. C.S. Evans and S. Walsh, trans. S. Walsh, *Fear and Trembling* (Cambridge University Press, 2006). I also indicate the corresponding page number in the most recent Danish edition of Kierkegaard's complete works, SKS Vol. 4.

[11] To find an agent's goal intelligible is not, of course, necessarily to approve of it or even to think it an intelligent thing to do. But there is an important difference between finding someone's action stupid and finding it incomprehensible.

twist in his narrative; it appears to stand in no intelligible relation to what has gone before. What Abraham sets out to Moriah to do is not only ethically atrocious, but also simply makes no sense. Johannes *de silentio* repeatedly emphasizes the incomprehensibility of Abraham's behavior: "Humanly speaking, he is mad, and cannot make himself intelligible to anyone" (FT 67/SKS 4, 167). But if Kierkegaard (as well as Johannes) does think that Abraham is to be admired as the "father of faith," then it seems that the old charge of irrationalism does indeed apply to his account of *religion*, even if his account of *ethics* can be defended against it. MacIntyre himself claims that

> Kierkegaard ... misconstrued the relation between reasoning and revelation. For he failed to realize that God, in revealing himself to us, appeals to our recognition of standards independent of Christian revelation ... prior to and independently of revelation and of the gift of faith, we do have a conception of the human good adequate to provide direction for our actions and a knowledge of the corresponding precepts of the natural law ... What we learn from ... revelation ... extends and reinforces, but never abrogates ... the natural law. So there is no possible place for anything that could be characterized as a teleological suspension of the ethical.[12]

And so MacIntyre concludes that his own perspective and Kierkegaard's are "not only different but irreconcilable ... systematically at odds, both philosophically and theologically."[13] If so, then the project of demonstrating the rationality of Kierkegaard's thought by reconciling it with modern narrative theory breaks down – at least as far as faith is concerned.

II

One possible response to this problem is to distinguish between Kierkegaard's views and those of Johannes *de silentio*. Johannes repeatedly denies that he has faith himself (see, e.g., FT 28, 31, 42/SKS 4, 129, 132–33, 143–44), so the account of faith that he gives is that of an outsider. Moreover, it is essentially negative; he tells us what faith is not (infinite resignation, tragic heroism, "immediate" feelings, philosophical theorizing) but insists that "Abraham [the exemplar of faith] I cannot understand!" (FT 31/SKS 4, 132). So perhaps faith only seems irrational (or non-narrativist) to Johannes because he himself does not really understand it. It is certainly true that one should not look to Johannes for Kierkegaard's

[12] MacIntyre (2001), p. 351. [13] *Ibid.*, p. 353.

full account of what faith involves (we should look to his "Upbuilding" and "Christian" Discourses for that). But I am skeptical of the more radical interpretations which see Kierkegaard as deliberately creating an incoherent text – setting his pseudonym up for a fall, as John Lippitt puts it[14] – so as to warn us (indirectly) against making the same mistake Johannes makes.[15] I think, at any rate, that one can rescue Kierkegaard from the charge of irrationalism without having to suppose that he distances himself so radically from what Johannes is saying. For we can plausibly read *Fear and Trembling* as expressing an understanding of faith on *Johannes'* part that is not simply irrationalist or anti-narrativist. Although it does not provide a full or positive account of the rationality that is proper to faith, *Fear and Trembling* is best seen not as a (deliberately set-up) failure to understand faith but as prolegomena to its proper understanding. It is a Socratic exercise (Johannes disclaims faith as Socrates disclaimed knowledge) that is intended to make us realize our ignorance about faith (the sense in which we are ignorant about faith) in a way that may help us move on to acquiring a deeper, existential understanding of what it is to live the life of faith.

I want to start to develop this reading by looking at a very interesting recent article by Jonathan Malesic, who argues that Johannes is himself divided in his thinking. He is drawn to thinking about Abraham's predicament in terms of a dramatic moment of crisis, about which he can ask: what should Abraham do here?

> Once the critical moment is located, Johannes can examine it and pass judgment on Abraham once and for all. In seeking the instant that explains everything, it is as if Johannes is taking a series of moral snapshots, freezing Abraham in time again and again.
>
> Despite the aesthetic force and moral certitude Johannes gains through focusing the episode into one moment, his doing so is theologically very problematic. In one respect, it emphasizes the fideism, irrationalism, and volitionalism for which Kierkegaard has been criticized.[16]

And Malesic draws our attention to the frequency with which vocabulary indicating a moment or instant – especially "*Øieblik*" – appears in the text: "In trying to make a clear-headed ethical judgment about Abraham, Johannes is always looking for crucial moments that lend themselves to analysis. Accordingly, *Øieblik* appears throughout the book."[17] On this

[14] Lippitt (2003), p. 178.
[15] See, for example, Conway (2002); Mulhall (2001), pp. 354–87; Kosch (2008).
[16] Malesic (2013), p. 210. [17] *Ibid.*, p. 215.

reading, Johannes, intent on scrutinizing isolated "moral snapshots," appears as a precursor to the sort of contemporary analytic moral philosopher who thinks that morality is best examined by focusing on "trolley cases" – dramatic (and usually improbable) examples in which someone has to make a snap decision between alternative courses of action.[18] (Do I let the runaway trolley kill ten people or divert it onto another line so it kills only two?) The idea is that an adequate moral theory must be one that will give us clear answers to such questions, and we can then debate whether the answers given by, for example, consequentialism or deontology are better. Neo-Aristotelian moral theories, like MacIntyre's, with their emphasis on narrative, the virtues and *phronesis* (a practical wisdom that cannot be reduced to explicit rules) arose precisely as a reaction against this view of morality.[19] But it is still common to read *Fear and Trembling* as assuming this trolley-case understanding of how to approach moral issues. For this seems to be what is presupposed when it is seen as primarily concerned to pose the dilemma: should Abraham have accepted the command to sacrifice Isaac, or should he have defied it? – and as encouraging us to give the former answer, on the ground that God's commands override moral duties.[20]

Malesic argues that Kierkegaard intends us to take Johannes' fixation on the dramatic moment as a *reductio* of this approach to ethics, one "that demonstrates the falsity of assuming that we must judge actions moment by moment, considering only moral snapshots divorced from narrative."[21] But he does not simply think that Kierkegaard has set Johannes up for a fall. For he finds places in the text where Johannes expresses a richer, narrative-based understanding of Abraham's predicament:

> Indeed, the stark dilemmas envisioned by the photographic gaze represent only one way of thinking through Abraham's situation. An alternative understanding of the time frames associated with ethical judgment appears in the brief "Tribute to Abraham" [where] instead of judging moral instants, he takes in greater temporal durations . . . Johannes is not looking for that one critical snapshot that he can hold up for ethical judgment. Instead, he is considering Abraham's expectations in the context of his having received a promise from God that through Isaac's progeny, Abraham

[18] This comparison is mine, not Malesic's, though I do not think he would disagree with it.
[19] See MacIntyre (2007); Anscombe (1958); Murdoch (1970) (which develops a Platonic, rather than Aristotelian critique of 'modern' ethics); and, more recently, Brewster's important book (2011).
[20] For a recent example of this kind of interpretation, see Stump (2010), pp. 260–63. Stump herself rejects what she takes (tentatively) to be Kierkegaard's understanding of the situation and develops a very interesting narrativist interpretation of Abraham's "binding" of Isaac. See *ibid.*, ch. 11 *passim*.
[21] Malesic (2013), p. 211.

> will become the father of nations. This different understanding of the relation between time and moral evaluation – attunement to narrative – leads to different understandings of moral decision, selfhood, and faith. To someone attuned to narrative, an agent's context matters for our evaluation of his moral activity.[22]

Now, I think that the narrativist understanding of Abraham that Malesic describes here is present not only in the 'Tribute' but also pervades – at least implicitly, and often explicitly – the whole text. And I think the "photographic" model, the focus on moral snapshots, is less evidently present than Malesic thinks it is – although someone approaching the text with the assumption that this *must* be the approach that a text on morality is taking will find much in it that it will seem natural to read in that way. But whether the text is designed by a (narrativist) Kierkegaard to exhibit an internal conflict between narrativist and "photographic" approaches, or is itself narrativist throughout, I want to examine briefly how it at any rate gives us materials for a narrativist interpretation of Abraham's situation – and one that suggests a narrativist understanding of faith more generally.

After the Preface, *Fear and Trembling* starts with 'Tuning Up,' a section in which four variations on the story of Abraham are told. In none of these versions does Abraham succeed in passing the test, becoming the father of faith. But in three of them (all except the first) it seems that nothing happens on Mount Moriah which is overtly different from what happens in the biblical version. In each of them, Abraham binds Isaac, draws the knife – and then substitutes the ram. In each of them we have the terrifying moment just before the intended sacrifice, the moment that could be illustrated by one of the many paintings intended to illustrate the actual biblical story.[23] But the meaning of the moment is quite different in each of these stories. (In one, Abraham subsequently loses all joy in life, despite getting Isaac back; in another, Abraham subsequently repents of having tried to make the sacrifice; in the third, Isaac, sensing his father's despair, loses his faith.) Already, this preliminary section suggests that the dramatic instant – Abraham holding the knife over his son – only gets its meaning from the wider context. This is further emphasized in the following section, the "Tribute to Abraham" which Malesic particularly notes. There we are reminded that the command to sacrifice Isaac is not only horrifying in the way that it would be to any loving father, but seems

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 219.

[23] Malesic refers explicitly to the painting by Caravaggio (in the Uffizi in Florence); see Malesic (2013), pp. 209–10.

to undermine the whole meaning of Abraham's life – his trust in God (for decades before he got the son of his old age) that God's promise would be fulfilled, that he would become the ancestor of a great nation. I noted above that this seemed to support an anti-narrativist reading (what Abraham did made no sense in terms of the story of his life to date). But on closer examination, I think it actually supports a narrativist understanding.

It is only in the narrative context of Abraham's whole life that one can appreciate the full horror and (apparent) absurdity of God's command, and therefore of the predicament that Abraham finds himself in and to which he must find a way of reacting. And it is only in the context of the wider narrative that his response does indeed make *some* kind of sense, while also remaining mysterious. Abraham does not simply obey a voice from out of the blue commanding the killing of his son. (His obedience to it would have been *simply* incomprehensible if that was all that was going on.) Nor does he respond to a merely demonic voice that backed up its command with credible threats to himself (and maybe Sarah and others also). Obedience in that case would be *too* comprehensible (though perhaps cowardly); it would not be a matter of faith at all, but simply of self-preserving prudence. In contrast to both those possible cases, Abraham, as seen by Johannes, responds to God as he does because he *trusts* God: "Abraham believed, and believed for this life" (FT 17/SKS 4, 116). At the heart of his faith (as distinct from infinite resignation) is the belief that God would not in the end require that he go through with the sacrifice. "He climbed the mountain and, even at the moment when the knife gleamed, he believed – that God would not demand Isaac" (FT 29/SKS 4, 131). And he further believed that, even if he *did* have to carry out the sacrifice, God would bring Isaac back to life (FT 30/SKS 4, 131).[24] That Abraham even *might* be other than a deranged murderer, or at best a terrorized victim of demonic intimidation, depends on the history of his relationship with God; one in which he has come, slowly and painfully, to trust in God's promises. As John Davenport has emphasized, faith in *Fear and Trembling* is essentially a matter of trust; the knight of faith does what seems humanly speaking crazy and wicked – but not for no reason at all, or as an assertion of absolute freedom, or out of terrified submission to superior force, or out of a Dionysian identification with the sublime violence of God's sheer power. He does what he does because he trusts

[24] These last two references, it should be said, are from the 'Preliminary Outpouring,' not the 'Tribute,' which I take to support my claim that the narrativist Johannes does not only appear in the 'Tribute.'

that what God has commanded is *not* in the end crazy or wicked.[25] Abraham acts because he has faith that, in the end, "all will be well."

It should be remembered that faith in *Fear and Trembling* is not a matter of believing that God exists – that is pretty much taken for granted throughout the book. It is, rather, a way of relating to God – personally, intensely, trustingly – that itself makes possible a radically transformed way of relating to the world of temporality and finitude. Early on in the book, Johannes writes: "if there were no eternal consciousness in a human being, if underlying everything there were only a wild fermenting force writhing in dark passions that produced everything great and insignificant . . . what would life be then but despair?" (FT 12/SKS 4, 112). "Eternal consciousness" here seems to refer to consciousness of the eternal, that is, of God. Infinite resignation has this consciousness and thus escapes the despair that Johannes invokes, but only by resigning the temporal, finite world, while finding comfort in one's relation to the radically transcendent Eternal. But this dualistic religiosity cannot find a way of connecting the eternal with the temporal, and thus, in a way, it concedes the correctness of the nihilistic vision quoted above, as far as the temporal world is concerned. Faith, by contrast, is able to be fully and richly present to the world of finitude and temporality; its fundamental trust in God extends to a trust in the meaningfulness and value of the created world. "A purely human courage is needed to renounce the whole of temporality in order to gain the eternal . . . But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage next to grasp the whole of temporality by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith . . . Temporality, finitude is what it is all about" (FT 41–42/SKS 4, 143). The suggestion here, I think, is that the meaningful narrative existence of the ethicist is only really possible on the basis of faith. One can only live one's life as a meaningful narrative if one can do so in the confidence that the world around one is itself ultimately meaningful. And for Johannes (as for Kierkegaard) it only can be if it derives from, and participates in, the absolute source of meaning which transcends and founds it. This is why infinite resignation is necessary – in it one recognizes the radical transcendence of God, in contrast to any pantheistic tendency to deify the world. But this resignation makes it possible to return, in faith, to the world that one has resigned and find it restored as a richly meaningful locus for one's being.[26] Although Johannes describes the knight of faith as doing this

[25] See Davenport (2008a).

[26] This is why the contemporary knight of faith, of whom Johannes gives a charming imaginative sketch, can be so happily absorbed in everything that goes on around him. "Everything that

"by virtue of the absurd," it is only through making this movement that one can have confidence that the world itself is *not* absurd; and thus to live a life that is itself ultimately non-absurd.

It is interesting to contrast Johannes' view of Abraham with what Sartre makes of the story:

> This is the anguish that Kierkegaard called "the anguish of Abraham." You know the story: An angel commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son; and obedience was obligatory, if it really was an angel who had appeared and said, "Thou, Abraham, shalt sacrifice thy son." But anyone in such a case would wonder, first, whether it was indeed an angel and secondly, whether I am really Abraham. Where are the proofs? . . . If an angel appears to me, what is the proof that it is an angel; or, if I hear voices, who can prove that they proceed from heaven and not from hell, or from my own subconsciousness or some pathological condition? Who can prove that they are really addressed to me?[27]

Sartre's memory of both *Fear and Trembling* and of Genesis seems to have been a little hazy (neither mentions an angel giving the command) but his epistemological point (how can I know?) is, on the face of it, reasonable enough.[28] The second question he raises is particularly interesting. Abraham might well in those circumstances doubt whether it was an angel that appeared to him, but why doubt whether he was Abraham? Perhaps (Sartre does not elaborate here) the point is the narrativist one; his sense of who he is, of what makes him *Abraham* (and, say, not just Abram, his original given name[29]) is bound up with his relation to God, his trust in God's promise to make him the ancestor of a great people. If God really is taking all that away from him, then his whole sense of identity, of who he is, is thrown into doubt.

However, in Johannes' version, none of this anguished (but, it would seem, perfectly reasonable) questioning occurs when Abraham receives the terrible command:

> We read in those sacred scriptures that "God tested Abraham and said, 'Abraham, Abraham, where are you?'" . . . Cheerfully, confidently, trustingly, he answered in a loud voice "Here am I" . . . he did not doubt, he did

happens – a rat scurrying under a gutter plank, children playing – everything engages him with a compose in existence as if he were a girl of sixteen" (FT 33/SKS 4, 135).

[27] Sartre (1948), p. 31.

[28] It is interesting that Sartre, for the sake of argument, assumes here that if it really was an angel, then obedience would indeed be required. But, of course, he ultimately rejects the idea that there are any obligations apart from the ones we have chosen to impose on ourselves.

[29] See Genesis 17:5.

> not look anxiously to the right or the left, he did not challenge heaven with his appeals. (FT 18/SKS 4, 117)

It is not that Johannes is blind to the issues Sartre raises. Of course one could ask: is this from God, or am I going mad? "Whether the single individual is now actually situated in a state of temptation, or is a knight of faith, only the individual can determine" (FT 69/SKS 4, 170). But what Johannes finds astonishing about Abraham is precisely that he is *not* paralyzed by such doubts, when they would seem so reasonable. If anything can make sense of that, it can only be the narrative of his whole past history, his developed relationship with God, his ability to recognize this demand as coming from God, and therefore as one that he can trust will have a good outcome.

III

However, a further challenge to the narrativist position might be raised at this point. For it might be said that it makes things *too* neat and easy, *too* comprehensible. If all *can* be understood, if Abraham has secure confidence in the goodness of God, then what of the terror and the anguish? Why is Abraham's outlook repeatedly described as "absurd"? What about the fear and trembling of the title? If we want to do justice both to the emphasis on absurdity and anguish *and* to the narrativist stress on contextual understanding and trust, we might conclude that Malesic is right – that Johannes is torn between different ways of looking at Abraham. For Johannes repeatedly states that he cannot understand Abraham. And yet the narrativist view, which sees Abraham's action in the context of the whole story of his life and developing relationship with God, *can*, it would seem, understand Abraham. His act, and more to the point, his attitude – incomprehensible if considered in isolation – become comprehensible when they are seen in context as expressions of trust in God. Johannes recognizes this at points, but then, it seems, forgets it again, when he declares Abraham incomprehensible.

In response to this, I think we need to distinguish between understanding and understanding. I can understand why Abraham did what he did in that I can recognize that it was an expression of trust in God, and my understanding of his act in relation to his whole past story, his hopes for the future, his relationship with God, enables me to see how it could be that in a way that would not have been possible if the story of the binding of Isaac were taken in isolation, out of that context. But it may still be impossible

for me to really understand how anyone could have done what Abraham did – what it would actually be like, from the inside, to be a knight of faith. It is this sort of understanding – subjective, existential understanding – that Johannes lacks. He cannot really place himself in Abraham's shoes, take his attitude as a live possibility that he might conceivably emulate. Toward the end of the book, after all his declarations that he cannot understand Abraham, Johannes several times admits that in a sense he *can* understand him: "This distress [arising from Abraham's inability to explain his actions to those he loves] I can well understand . . . But I also confess I do not have courage for it" (FT 101/SKS 4, 202). Again, "a final word from Abraham has in fact been preserved and, insofar as I can understand the paradox, I can also understand Abraham's total presence in that word" (FT 104/SKS 4, 206). And finally, "Here again, then, it appears that one may well understand Abraham, but only in the way one understands the paradox. For my part I can perhaps understand Abraham, but realize as well that I do not have courage to speak in this way, no more than I have courage to act like Abraham" (FT 105/SKS 4, 207). Intellectually, he can understand what Abraham's predicament is and he can understand that Abraham responded with faith and that this was based on his ultimate trust in God. But he lacks the "courage," the faith, to be able to have an existentially real sense of what it would be to respond in that way.

Not that Johannes' understanding of Abraham is a merely intellectual one. He identifies himself as a knight of infinite resignation (see FT 29, 42/SKS 4, 130, 143). As such, he can understand existentially – he is confident that he *could* emulate – Abraham's sacrifice of what gave his earthly life its meaning: "I know very well what I would have done. I would not have been cowardly enough to stay home, nor lagged and loafed along the road, nor forgotten the knife in order that there might be a little delay" (FT 28/SKS 4, 130). It is, however, the confidence that ultimately – somehow – he will get Isaac back – that constitutes *faith* as such; and it is *faith* that Johannes says he lacks. This faith is not the "sorry, half-hearted apathy that thinks, 'Never mind, it's not worth worrying about ahead of time' [or] the paltry hope that says 'One can't know what will happen, it's still possible'" (FT 30–31/SKS 4, 132). What Johannes cannot understand is how, having abandoned these "caricatures of faith," Abraham is able to have the trust in God that enables him to act with confidence rather than despair.

Abraham's anguish is greatly emphasized by Johannes. But that is compatible with Abraham's trusting God, understanding why he is acting as he is, and believing that in the end Isaac will not be taken from him. As Eleanore Stump puts it:

> The poignancy of Abraham's position should . . . be clear. Even whole-hearted belief in God's goodness is not incompatible with great suffering regarding the outcome staked on God's goodness. (Think only of a parent's belief in the competence and truthfulness of the surgeon who tells her that her child will certainly come through the surgery beautifully and of her anxiety and misery as she waits for the completion of the operation.) Even whole-hearted belief in God's goodness can co-exist with anguish for Abraham because it is Isaac's life that is at risk.[30]

Even though he trusts that God will ensure that the outcome is somehow a good one, Abraham has to live through the agony that takes him from the command to the outcome. This is the crucial difference between living a series of events as a narrative and looking back on them once the narrative has achieved (a degree of) closure. *We* can look back and say, "it was just a trial," since we know the outcome. Abraham could only *trust* that the outcome would *somehow* be good; and, however deep his trust, it can only be in anguish that he makes his way toward that outcome.

What, though, can we make of Johannes' repeated emphasis on the "absurdity" of Abraham's belief that Isaac will not in the end be demanded of him? For if (on Johannes' own account) Abraham trusts God, and thinks he has good reason to trust God, then it would seem that to him this belief is *not* absurd. Kierkegaard himself makes this point in his *Journals*. In response to what he saw as a misunderstanding of *Fear and Trembling*, he remarks that "When the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd – faith transforms it."[31] So faith does appear absurd to Johannes, since he lacks faith. But to Abraham, who has faith, it does not appear absurd. We should note, though, that even for Johannes, the "absurdity" of faith does not mean that it appears to him as something that is simply crazy or irrational. He recognizes that Abraham does not experience his faith as absurd, and he respects this experience rather than dismissing it as delusional. But he cannot understand it, though he can understand what it is not. Johannes is (as we noted above) careful to distinguish Abraham's attitude from the kind of wishful thinking that he *does* regard as ridiculous, as well as cowardly. Abraham "believed by virtue of the absurd, for all human calculation had long since ceased" (FT 30/SKS 4, 131). "The absurd" then, is not poor or foolish human calculation, but what goes beyond all such calculation. Which is why infinite resignation is a "purely philosophical movement" requiring a "purely human courage" while the

[30] Stump (2010), p. 299. [31] JP 1, 10.

"paradoxical and humble courage" of faith is needed "to grasp the whole of temporality by virtue of the absurd" (FT 41/SKS 4, 143).

What Johannes is really getting at with his talk of "absurdity" has, I think, to do with the irreducible particularity of Abraham's situation. Abraham's faith is a matter of his singular personal relationship with God, not simply as a philosophical absolute, but as one with whom it is possible to enter an I–Thou relationship. Johannes talks of "the wonderful glory that knight [of faith] attains in becoming God's confidant, the Lord's friend, and, to speak very humanly, in saying 'You' [Du] to God in heaven, whereas even the tragic hero addresses him only in the third person" (FT 68/SKS 4, 168). Hence, his faith and trust in God are not based on general propositions about God's trustworthiness, but on his personal history of relating to God. But while this may make his faith reasonable to him, it also makes it inaccessible to anyone else. Analogously, someone may steadfastly believe in the innocence of a close friend or relative accused of a crime, even though all the evidence points against him: "I just know he couldn't have done that." Of course, the person in question may be deluded. But it may be that her personal knowledge of the accused *does* give her reasons for her belief even though they are not like, or commensurable with, the objective reasons that emerged from the forensic lab. A persistent belief in the person's innocence despite the evidence may be "absurd" in something close to Johannes' sense, while being quite comprehensible – and, possibly, even justified. And the friend or relative might recognize that others are justified in believing the person guilty – she need not suppose that there has been a failure of the police or justice system – while still believing that the person found guilty is innocent: "Maybe only someone who knows him as well as I do could realize he couldn't have done it." And this may be true.

The "absurdity" of Abraham's faith is, then, tied to his subjectivity, his status as the "single individual" that Johannes so emphasizes. This, of course, distinguishes the knight of faith from the tragic hero, who has to override his or her personal feelings (as well as a lower ethical obligation) for the sake of a higher ethical duty. For the knight, both feelings and ethical duty as a whole have to be overridden. This is the notorious "teleological suspension of the ethical." But the essential point is that it is still *teleological* – it is done for the sake of a higher (highest) good – one's absolute duty to God. In that sense, it *does* remain intelligible. There is a real similarity between the knight of faith and the tragic hero, which we should not forget, despite Johannes' focus on the difference between them. Both do something that is appalling, but for the sake of a higher good.

That is why neither is simply depraved or crazy. The difference between them is that the knight's actions are based on a purely personal relation to God: "in this relationship of duty the single individual relates himself as the single individual absolutely to the absolute" (FT 61/SKS 4, 162). This takes the knight of faith altogether out of the ethical *as Johannes understands it*, because, for him, the distinguishing mark of the ethical is its universality. ("The ethical is the universal," Johannes repeats at the beginning of each of the three 'Problems.') But the knight of faith does remain within the sphere of teleological thinking about the good; and therefore, we might reasonably say, of ethics broadly construed.[32]

IV

The radical singularity of Abraham's relation to God is the key to seeing why he cannot speak, cannot explain himself to Isaac, to Sarah, to Eliezer. Abraham's silence might again seem to count against the narrativist interpretation – how can his actions be understood as having the intelligibility of a narrative if he cannot say what he is doing?[33] If the reason that he cannot say is because he does not know himself, then there could still be a narrative explanation for his actions that someone else could give (Abraham's psychoanalyst) – but it seems pretty clear that this model cannot be applied to Abraham as father of faith. So it must be that he knows but cannot say. But, again, if there is an intelligible narrative here, should it not be intelligible to everyone? I think the answer has to be, in a sense yes, and in a sense no. Abraham *can* explain. He can say that he is going to sacrifice Isaac because God demands it; he can explain to or remind his listeners of his history, of the fulfillment of God's past promises; he can even explain that he believes that this is a trial, a test of his faith. But Isaac, Sarah, Eliezer, though they can hear these words and understand them in a way (they know what the words mean) cannot really make sense of them, cannot grasp the deeply first-personal nature of the experience that Abraham is trying to convey:

> Abraham can say the most beautiful words any language can procure about how he loves Isaac. But this is not what at heart he has in mind to say, it is something deeper, that he is willing to sacrifice Isaac because it is a trial. No one can understand the latter and so everyone can only misunderstand the former. (FT 100/SKS 4, 201)

[32] Stephen Evans argues that "the ethical" in *Fear and Trembling* – what gets suspended – is essentially Hegelian social ethics – *Sittlichkeit*. See his 'Introduction' to FT, pp. xx–xxii.

[33] This challenge is raised forcefully in Kosch (2008), pp. 63–70.

Again, one has to distinguish between understanding and understanding. On Johannes' view, we can understand in a sense what Abraham thinks is going on; we know that he is not, for example, intending to kill Isaac as a punishment, or to satisfy his own sadistic urges. But we cannot really understand existentially how he could do what he is doing. And nor, on Johannes' view, could he really communicate that to Isaac or Sarah. It is not that Abraham literally cannot speak, nor is it the case that he cannot be understood at all. But, according to Johannes, Abraham cannot speak in a way that will bring Sarah or Isaac to understand existentially, to accept, to share, what he believes to be the rightness of his actions.

But even if Abraham's outlook is not literally unintelligible, it still seems that Johannes' account makes the faith that he exemplifies into something so radically subjective as to be effectively, *existentially*, incommunicable. This is, I think, a real defect in his account, and one which Kierkegaard wants us to note as a defect. Johannes is surely right to say that there may be situations in which someone is unable to explain his or her actions in a way that could really be comprehended by those who most need to comprehend them; those who are closest to the agent and most deeply affected by his or her actions. But if he is really making the broader claim that faith is always and necessarily incommunicable, that is not adequately supported by his reflections on Abraham, and does not seem plausible as a general thesis. Nor is it a thesis that we should ascribe to Kierkegaard. If he had thought that faith is something so deeply subjective and personal that no one can say anything existentially useful to anyone else about it (except negatively, as Johannes does), then he would hardly have bothered to write his Edifying Discourses. My own view is that Kierkegaard intended Johannes to serve as a corrective to Hegelian (and Grundtvigian) confidence in faith as something shared and communal; he uses him to stress the deeply subjective and personal nature of faith, but without wanting to endorse the almost solipsistic view of faith that Johannes eventually arrives at. This is not to say that Kierkegaard exactly sets Johannes up for a fall; he uses him to articulate a view he himself holds deeply and passionately, but allows him to take it to an extreme which a reader – having once been shocked into realizing the truth in what he says – can then tack away from. Kierkegaard, with the intent of ultimately straightening a warped timber, has Johannes bend it a bit too far in the opposite direction from the one in which it was originally warped. But, as I have tried to show in this chapter, even on Johannes' own view, the sense in which Abraham's attitudes and intentions are incommunicable does not conflict with their still having a kind of narrative intelligibility to them.

CHAPTER 11

Particularity and ethical attunement: situating Problema *III*

Daniel Conway

Introduction

Shortly after launching *Problema* III, Johannes *de silentio* vows to adopt a more venturesome approach. Were he to continue to ply his present course, he surmises, he very soon would reach a familiar destination and a familiar impasse – namely, the *paradox*, wherein the "single individual" is elevated in his particularity above the ethical universal. In that event, Johannes realizes, he would have nothing new to say in response to the titular question of *Problema* III. Having identified the ethical universal as "the disclosed" (FT 82/SKS 4, 72),[1] moreover, he now must be prepared to treat *any* act of secrecy or concealment as an ethical offense. In this light, *Problema* III appears to be headed for a conclusion similar to those delivered by *Problemata* I–II, which, he fears, would not advance our understanding of Abraham.

Johannes thus resolves to proceed "purely aesthetically," which means, inter alia, that he will bypass the ethical universal, focusing instead on particular cases in which star-crossed lovers conceal their true aims and guiding aspirations from those whom they love.[2] His aim in doing so, as we shall see, is to determine if some of these acts of concealment might be understood to serve identifiably *ethical* ends. In that event, presumably, these cases might qualify as exceptions to the general ethical rule,[3] and the concealments they feature might be judged on that basis to be "ethically defensible." The point of this extended digression, moreover, is to build a consensus in favor of treating one or more of Abraham's acts of concealment as an exception to the general rule, such that we would be persuaded

I am pleased to acknowledge the generous advice I received from Claire Katz, Jacob Howland, and Edward Mooney on earlier drafts of this chapter.

[1] My citations from the text of *Fear and Trembling* rely on KW 6, Hong's translation. My citations from Kierkegaard's Danish text rely on SKS, Bind 4.

[2] See Perkins (1993), pp. 157–60.

[3] Here I follow Keeley (1993), pp. 128–30; and Stern (2003), pp. 36–38.

to respond in the affirmative to the titular question that stands at the head of *Problema* III. In that event, Johannes may proceed as planned with his campaign to understand Abraham on the model of the knight of faith.

If Johannes is ultimately concerned to render an ethical judgment of Abraham, however, why does he resolve to proceed "purely aesthetically" in *Problema* III? Is this not like searching for mislaid keys where the light is brightest, as opposed to where the keys were last seen or handled? It would no doubt be useful for us "to have esthetic hiddenness and the paradox appear in their absolute dissimilarity" (FT 85/SKS 4, 175), which is the outcome Johannes anticipates. But how will the appearance of this "dissimilarity" expedite an ethical evaluation of Abraham's concealments? That is, what positive, enduring role does Johannes envision in his larger investigation for the impure hybrid cases he considers over the course of this digression? Indeed, why are these cases not simply irrelevant, as the ethical universal has unambiguously decreed?

His genuine aim in proceeding "purely aesthetically," I submit, is to reacquaint himself and his readers with the neglected ethical resources that their preoccupation with the ethical universal has led them to disown. As they gain insight into the aforementioned "dissimilarity," they are also likely to become increasingly comfortable with the notion that secrets, silences, concealments, and lies *can*, on occasion, further ethical aims. Having become increasingly familiar with those "aesthetic heroes" who resort to self-concealment to assist others, that is, his readers may warm to his own efforts, in the latter half of *Problema* III, to construct a type of hero on which Abraham's concealments may be modeled.[4] Apparently, then, Johannes' goal in introducing his readers to the hybrid forms arrayed throughout the *confinium* is twofold: He wishes to apprise (or remind) them of the limits of the ethical universal; and he hopes thereby to stimulate their demand for an enlarged experience of ethical life. In particular, he hopes to persuade them of the desirability of an ethical sphere in which the claims of ethical universality are balanced against the claims of "ethically defensible" exceptions and singularities.

As we shall see, in fact, the extended digression Johannes launches in *Problema* III is designed to enroll his best readers in a covert regimen of education and training, which, he hopes, will promote their attunement to the kind of "ethically defensible" exception that he wishes to claim for Abraham. If he proves successful in this endeavor, his readers may be inclined to agree that Abraham *was* ethically justified in concealing his

[4] I am indebted here to Lippitt (2003), pp. 129–32.

aims from Sarah, Eliezer, and (especially) Isaac. In that event, Johannes may yet burnish his credentials as the long-awaited poet whom Abraham uniquely deserves. He will do so, as we shall see, by persuading his best readers that they, too, are poets in their own right.

Excursion to the *confinium*

At the conclusion of the initial paragraph of *Problema* III, Johannes presents himself as both determined and obliged to try something new. Having dutifully consulted the wisdom of the ethical universal, and having thrice failed to account for Abraham in the singularity of his faith, Johannes resolves to look elsewhere for edification. Likening his proposed digression to a daring journey or excursion, he reveals his target destination: the category of the "interesting" (FT 82/SKS 4, 173), which he identifies as a "border category" or *confinium* (FT 83/SKS 4, 173). The border in question both joins and separates the *aesthetic* and *ethical* spheres of existence, which accounts for the hybridity of the "interesting" characters whom we encounter there.

Johannes finds this destination attractive inasmuch as it houses the displaced ethical resources that formerly resided in, and hallowed, the ethical sphere itself. Indeed, we apparently are meant to understand that the hallmarks of the *confinium* – including hybridity, particularity, exceptionality, and irony – were at one time acknowledged to belong, and integrally so, to the ethical sphere. Only recently, as the ethical sphere has increasingly identified itself with the categorical pronouncements of the ethical universal, have these impure, hybrid forms been relegated to the *confinium*. In this respect, it is little wonder that Johannes is so eager to take leave of the dreary purity of the ethical universal and refresh himself in the intoxicating hybridity of the *confinium*. Embedded therein, he believes, are the neglected resources that may embolden us to judge one or more of Abraham's concealments to be "ethically defensible."

This is a risky strategy, to be sure, for any resources he discovers in the *confinium* are likely to be barred from importation into the ethical sphere. As we know, the opposition of the ethical universal to concealments of any kind is both categorical and non-negotiable. Presumably, this opposition extends to the ostensibly ethical concealments that Johannes depicts so sympathetically in *Problema* III, as various anguished lovers resort to secrecy or silence in order to rescue their beloveds.[5] Although he presents

[5] For instructive treatments of these hybrid cases, see Lippitt (2003), pp. 119–29; and Carlisle (2010), pp. 146–61. See also Mooney and Lloyd's chapter in this volume.

his excursion to the *confinium* as a harmless digression, in fact, his genuine intention is to motivate a challenge to the authority and viability of the ethical sphere in its current, impoverished incarnation. Toward this end, he endeavors to apprise (or remind) his readers of the need for any healthy ethical sphere to make exceptions, and thereby accommodate the claims of particularity and singularity.

As we shall see, Johannes is especially keen to remind his readers of their own habituation to, and reliance on, various "ethically defensible" exceptions to the general laws and prohibitions they observe. Doing so, he believes, will encourage in them a measure of respect for the indeterminacy associated with particularity and singularity. His hope, apparently, is that his excursion to the *confinium* will have the effect of softening the rigid boundaries of the ethical sphere in its current incarnation. So although the ethical sphere from which he decamps in *Problema* III is categorically hostile to the hybrid types and forms he samples in the *confinium*, the ethical sphere to which he returns may be more resilient and forgiving, owing in large part to his efforts to educate and train a sympathetic audience. Indeed, even those readers who are not persuaded by his defense of Abraham may be intrigued by his creative retrieval and re-purposing of the discarded ethical resources he discovers in the *confinium*. As we shall see, in fact, he invites these readers to join him in mounting an immanent critique of the ethical sphere in its current incarnation.

Despite promising to proceed "purely aesthetically," that is, Johannes has every intention of mobilizing the hybrid ethical resources he discovers in the *confinium*. His goal in doing so is to familiarize his readers with the related tasks of *recognizing* and *authorizing* "ethically defensible" exceptions. Although he vows to "seize the problem with aesthetic fervor and concupiscence," he also advises that his "examination must constantly wander [*bestandig streife*] into the territory of ethics" (FT 83/SKS 4, 173). This emphasis on *wandering* – that is, on deviating from the established script or scheme – confirms his intention to deploy an improvisational approach to the problem that guides his investigation. Inasmuch as Abraham too was an intrepid wanderer, we may be meant to appreciate the errancy on display in *Problema* III as designed to place Johannes on a more advantageous footing with his elusive quarry.

In commencing to wander, Johannes also signals his intention to abandon his familiar strategy of following Abraham from a safe distance. Apparently taking his cue from Luther,[6] Johannes has modeled himself

[6] See Luther (1964), pp. 114–18. See also Carlisle (2010), pp. 131–32, 163–64; and her chapter in this volume.

thus far on the figure of Eliezer, the trusted servant who remained behind with the beasts of burden as Abraham and Isaac ascended Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:5). Like the serial pilgrim whom he describes in the "Attunement," in fact, Johannes has been content thus far to place himself in the vicinity or neighborhood of faith, rather than at the center of its terrifying intensity.[7] As we have seen, however, this strategy has not yielded the understanding of Abraham that Johannes has sought for himself. No longer willing to follow meekly in the footsteps of Abraham, he plunges headlong into the uncharted *confinium*, thereby opening himself to the crippling moment of self-realization that awaits him in the concluding paragraphs of *Problema* III.

Although Johannes advances good reasons for trying a different approach in *Problema* III, these reasons also serve as pretexts for the adventure that follows. Much like a dancer or gymnast who has completed his compulsory exercises, Johannes relishes the opportunity for freestyle expression and creative interpretation.[8] In truth, that is, he is drawn to the freedom and indeterminacy of the aesthetic–ethical *confinium*. There he is granted unfettered imaginative access to colorful, hybrid characters, whose secrets and silences, like his own, are neither obviously nor unambiguously unethical. Much as he did earlier, in his equally ingenious *Preliminary Expectoration*, Johannes appears very much at home in the *confinium*, in full command of the plastic hybrid forms swirling around him. As we recall from his *Preliminary Expectoration*, Johannes is at his lyrical best when granted the freedom to blur the boundaries and tweak the categories established, supposedly, by the imperious System.[9] As we shall see, in fact, Johannes is every bit the poet, even if he requires the artifice of extraordinary circumstances to surrender himself to his muse.

It would not be too great an exaggeration, in fact, to describe his excursion to the *confinium* as a *homecoming* of sorts. Indeed, he finds there the remnants of an ethical sphere in which, supposedly, he (or his forebears) once enjoyed a spiritually rich ethical existence. Most notably, these remnants include the discarded, particularity-friendly resources that he means to employ in his efforts to educate his readers. Inasmuch as he apparently intends to recreate the ethical sphere of his youth, however, we should be wary of the possible effects on his narrative of the distortions introduced by his potent nostalgia. In particular, we should be careful to

[7] Following Mackey (1986), p. 41, I take Johannes to be, or to wish to be, the pilgrim to whom he attributes the strategy of imaginatively visiting and revisiting the journey to Moriah. See Conway (2003).

[8] See Mooney and Lloyd's chapter in this volume.

[9] See Conway (2013), pp. 27–34.

monitor him for signs of the self-loathing that, according to him, feeds his generation's campaign to "cross out passion." Especially as his quest for Abraham falters, he too may be tempted to forfeit his claim to a spiritually fortified existence in an enlarged incarnation of the ethical sphere.

So although it may be the case that Johannes has no choice but to detour through the aesthetic–ethical *confinium*, he also wishes to do so. He has waited patiently for this moment, enduring the cold, formulaic pronouncements of the ethical universal, and we should not be surprised that his own particularity surfaces as *Problema* III unfolds. As it turns out, in fact, his excursion to the *confinium* is not only playful and creative, but also restorative. When he finally resumes his quest for Abraham, he exudes an intrepid confidence that he has not previously displayed. As he relaxes his familiar regimen of self-control, moreover, he opens himself in *Problema* III to the kind (and magnitude) of interruption that may succeed in advancing his stalled quest for self-understanding. Indeed, his cultivation of vulnerability in *Problema* III may be the most surprising yield of the errant strategy he adopts. He will come to understand Abraham, he apparently realizes, only by striking out on his own, thereby courting the kind of adventitious opportunities that shaped Abraham. He will approach Abraham, that is, not as a devout pilgrim, but as a knight-errant, as a reckless wanderer in his own right. This means, of course, that he will do so unprepared and mostly defenseless, much as Abraham confronted his own destiny.

As this last point suggests, the venturesome approach he adopts in *Problema* III is fraught with unanticipated peril. He may chafe under the yoke of the ethical universal, but he also enjoys the insulation it affords him from the potentially disruptive singularity of Abraham's faith. (In this respect, in fact, he is very much like his despised contemporaries.) Here it bears noting, in fact, that he strikes out for the *confinium* not as one of the plucky knights or stalwart heroes whom he so richly imagines, but as a flawed and frightened mortal, hampered by the anxiety, distress, and loneliness that he desperately hopes to discover in Abraham. Although we should not expect him to succeed in this quest, we may expect to be edified by his failures.

In this respect, the venturesome approach adopted by Johannes in *Problema* III may be seen to reproduce Kierkegaard's own strategy in fashioning the pseudonymous authorship that includes *Fear and Trembling*. In both cases, the presumed goal is to liberate and rejuvenate the imagination, so that the author in question (whether Johannes or Kierkegaard) may propel himself beyond the rigid categories and suffocating

bounds of conventional thinking. Much as Kierkegaard deputized his pseudonyms to convey what he could (or would) not, so Johannes positions himself in *Problema* III to express an expanded range of those emotions and impulses he has held in check thus far. Despite being pledged to silence, that is, Johannes apparently wishes to disclose something about himself that is likely to surprise both him and us. When he does so, we may expect to gain insight into his troubled interiority *and*, perhaps, into Kierkegaard's as well.

Ethically defensible exceptions

In defending his venturesome approach, Johannes presents his current predicament as the unavoidable result of his consideration of the titular question of *Problema* III. Pledged to determine if it was "ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, from Isaac" (FT 82/SKS 4, 172), Johannes dutifully consults the wisdom of the ethical universal. To no one's surprise, the ethical universal makes no provisions for the kind of exception that Johannes seeks in the case of Abraham. From the perspective of the ethical universal, *any* instance of concealment must be judged an offense, for which full disclosure is the sole prescribed remedy (FT 82/SKS 4, 172). This means that the titular question of *Problema* III is likely to be answered, swiftly and emphatically, in the negative: It was *not* ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking, simply because it is never ethically defensible for anyone to do so.

As we know from the *Problemata*, this conclusion has nothing whatsoever to do with Abraham or the particular concealments he is believed to have performed. Nor does it have anything to do with the ethical and/or religious aims his concealments may have been meant to serve. It has to do simply with the application of a general ethical principle to a particular instance of concealment. The initial paragraph of *Problema* III thus confirms that Johannes enjoys no further recourse to the potent resources of ethical universality. He has consulted the ethical universal on three separate occasions, and each time he has received a negative evaluation of Abraham. In other words, the impasse he foresees and wishes to avoid is the likely consequence of his attempt, using the resources and methods at hand, to answer this particular question.

While no doubt illuminating, however, this explanation of his predicament begs the question of *why* he is so determined to consider *this* problem. After all, the questions he takes up in the *Problemata* are neither

deduced from eternal verities nor handed down by gods. He easily could have proposed an alternative third problem, or none at all, and still could do so at any time. Yet he does not. He insists on investigating *this* problem, by way of addressing *this* question, even though he correctly anticipates the impasse that lies ahead. We are thus obliged to conclude that Johannes wishes to address this particular question, even though he knows in advance the answer he will receive. Far from a victim of circumstance, much less of the System, Johannes is in fact the architect of the predicament in which he now finds himself. Having granted the ethical universal its due, he is now free to petition an alternative source of ethical justification, which is precisely what he does.

Rather than pose yet another general question, in response to which another equally general answer would be formulated, producing yet another paralyzing dilemma, Johannes proposes to consider three particular acts of concealment that were perpetrated by Abraham against three separate "ethical authorities": Sarah, Eliezer, and Isaac.[10] His question, as we have seen, is whether or not it was "ethically defensible" [*ethisk forsvarligt*] for Abraham to conceal his aims from these authorities (FT 82/SKS 4, 172). In *Problema* III, that is, Johannes finally resolves to treat Abraham as he has wished to treat him all along – namely, as a singularity, a law unto himself. Any exception we might be persuaded to make for Abraham will pertain only to him in his particularity.

The aforementioned acts of concealment correspond to three important stages of Abraham's journey to Moriah: beginning (Sarah); midpoint (Eliezer); and end (or "end") (Isaac).[11] In each case, moreover, the concealment in question serves to exclude from Abraham's company a previously acknowledged "ethical authority." Presumably, any one of these cases of concealment might warrant an exception to the general ethical rule, based on our consideration of who was involved, the aim of the concealment, and the larger ends, if any, it served. As we know, however, Johannes further restricts his focus in *Problema* III to the third of these acts of concealment, which is the deception accomplished by his promise of divine providence (Genesis 22:8). Although Johannes identifies Sarah

[10] See, for example, Keeley (1993), pp. 127–30; and Stewart (2003), pp. 329–35.

[11] Following Luther, Johannes imagines a context in which Abraham issues a "final word" or consummatory pronouncement. Unlike Luther, who imagines an exchange between Abraham and Isaac that is not recorded in Genesis (112–13), Johannes locates Abraham's "final word" in his promise of divine providence (FT 116–18/SKS 4, 203–206). In doing so, he appeals to the model of Socrates, who, qua "intellectual tragic hero," spoke a "final word" that allowed him to "consummate himself" in the decisive moment (FT 116/SKS 4, 204).

and Eliezer as victims of Abraham's practice of serial concealment, that is, he does not consider their cases in any detail.

His reason for neglecting them, apparently, is that Abraham did not speak at all to Sarah and only minimally (and instrumentally) to Eliezer.[12] To Isaac, however, Abraham issued his famous promise of divine providence, which interests Johannes precisely because it appears to implicate Abraham in a manipulative prevarication. Having concealed his aims from Sarah and Eliezer by means of his silence,[13] which, one might argue, he was pledged to keep, Abraham concealed his aims from Isaac by means of his evasive response to a direct question posed by Isaac. In short, what Johannes aims to determine in *Problema* III is whether or not it was "ethically defensible" for Abraham to lie (or "lie") to Isaac.[14] Much as the third of the *Problemata* is qualitatively different from its predecessors, that is, so too is the third of Abraham's acts of concealment.[15]

Johannes' readers may be forgiven if they are confused by this maneuver. Where does he propose to find the alternative source of ethical justification that he now seeks to consult? Thus far in the *Problemata*, after all, the only source of ethical justification that he has petitioned has been the ethical universal. As he dutifully intones at the outset of each of the *problemata*, "the ethical is the universal" [*Det Ethiske er . . . det Almene*] (FT 54, 68, 82/SKS 4, 148, 160, 172). Presumably, this means that any action deemed "ethically defensible" must belong to a type or class of actions that is generally permitted. In its brute particularity, the action in question is neither affirmed nor denied; only the type or class to which it belongs is judged by the ethical universal. Thus far in the *Problemata*, moreover, Johannes has led us to believe that any and all exceptions to these general rules and prohibitions are to be dismissed out of hand. Now, however, he bids us to reconsider.

While his turn to particularity is hardly surprising, his readers may be taken aback by his suggestion that particularity may admit of an *ethical* defense or justification. Throughout the first two *Problemata*, we recall, Johannes proceeded under the unquestioned assumption that the ethical universal both determines and expresses the truth of the ethical sphere. Even in the initial paragraph of *Problema* III, as we have seen, he observes that "the ethical as such is the universal . . . [and] is in turn the disclosed"

[12] As the biblical text confirms, Abraham certainly appears to mislead Eliezer with respect to his aims: "We will worship and then we will come back to you" (Genesis 22:5). The difference, I take it, has to do with Eliezer's status as servant. Even if trusted and beloved by Abraham, Eliezer is not his son.

[13] See Mooney (1991), pp. 113–15. [14] See Derrida (1995), pp. 59–60; and Stern (2003), pp. 34–35.

[15] On this point, see Perkins (1993), pp. 175–76.

(FT 82/SKS 4, 172). This means, as he acknowledges, that the "ethical task" awaiting the "single individual" is "to become disclosed in the universal" (FT 82/SKS 4, 172). As described, that is, the ethical universal affords him no latitude for making an exception for Abraham (or anyone else), which is why he correctly anticipates the likely repetition of his earlier collisions with the paradox. If the ethical universal is understood to communicate the full truth of the ethical sphere, then Abraham is lost to us. It is that simple.

Presumably, this is why Johannes poses the specific question that stands at the head of *Problema* III. In order for this question to be meaningful, much less deserving of the affirmative response that Johannes hopes to motivate, it must be the case that he intends to appeal to – and, so, to invoke – an ethical standard other than that of ethical universality. In this context, in other words, the designation *ethically defensible* is meant to trade on – and, perhaps, to introduce – the notion of an *ethical exception* or *ethical particularity*. While no such exception is identified at the outset of *Problema* III, the possibility of such is presented, and subsequently treated, as meaningful. Inasmuch as the only other option available to him is to be done with Abraham, the continuation of his quest for Abraham now depends, crucially, on the possibility of an "ethically defensible" exception to the general ban on secrets, lies, concealments, and silences.

In reacquainting his readers with the exceptions they already make and acknowledge, Johannes aims to reawaken the moral authority that lies dormant in them. His point, apparently, is that exceptions are ultimately made (or not) on the basis and authority of human fiat. They become fixed points of reference as they attract consensus and accrue validity within a living ethical tradition or community. At one time, he apparently means to suggest, the exceptions we now endorse may not have been permitted; indeed, they may have been regarded as straightforward transgressions. Hence the division of labor that he envisions for a healthy incarnation of the ethical sphere: The ethical universal expresses itself by means of categorically binding laws and prohibitions, and the residents of the ethical sphere intervene on occasion to limit the scope and application of these laws and prohibitions. They do so, as we have seen, by making exceptions and persuading others to do likewise. In this respect, the recurring question of who is and is not a *poet* acquires a more general relevance. By virtue of making and observing exceptions to general laws and prohibitions, we may be said to be poets – that is, makers, fashioners, legislators – in our own right. In particular, we craft the stories that justify the exceptions we make and allow.

Johannes thus proceeds under the assumption that it is up to *us* to determine whether or not any such exception is warranted. If he can persuade us that Abraham's promise of divine providence qualifies as an "ethically defensible" exception, he will have made significant progress toward becoming the poet that Abraham deserves. In that event, his encomium, unlike those of his rivals and predecessors, would be validated as legitimate. The important point here is that the alternative source of ethical justification he seeks in *Problema* III lies in *us*, that is, in our capacity to exercise discretionary judgment and, if appropriate, to limit the jurisdiction of the ethical universal. On the strength of the defense he provides in *Problema* III, he wants us to determine that Abraham's promise to Isaac was "ethically defensible."

Johannes may have failed to provide his readers with fair warning of his impending change of course in *Problema* III, but his turn to particularity should not be understood as a departure from his treatment thus far of the ethical sphere. If we consider *Fear and Trembling* in its entirety, we find Johannes steadfast in his desire to isolate – and not simply take for granted – the singular faith of Abraham. This task in turn obliges him to confront Abraham in his particularity, which is the seat or source of his avowed greatness. Throughout *Fear and Trembling*, moreover, Johannes consistently objects to any interpretation of Abraham that seeks to submerge, elide, or discount the particularity of his faith.[16] Indeed, the general challenge that he forwards in *Fear and Trembling* is credible only if his readers are persuaded that Abraham in his particularity does or should play *some* role, however indirect or ill defined, in their ethical existence. If Johannes' treatment of Abraham admits of an aberration, that is, it lies in his respectful appeal throughout the *Problemata* to the wisdom of the ethical universal, which, he knows, is inimical to all exceptions and singularities.

Why, then, does he bother at all to consult the ethical universal? First of all, he sincerely means to grant it its due. Although he is critical of his contemporaries for hiding behind its categorical pronouncements, he honors the role of the ethical universal in structuring any healthy incarnation of the ethical sphere. He simply wishes for his readers to acknowledge its limits and, in so doing, to accept responsibility for restricting its jurisdiction. Second, he wishes to demonstrate to everyone's satisfaction that the ethical universal can neither isolate nor affirm the faith of Abraham. (As we shall see, it is this demonstration that licenses his campaign in

[16] See Conway (2013), pp. 34–38.

Problema III to educate the "Hegelian philosophy" about the "later immediacy" of faith (FT 82/SKS 4, 172).) Third, Johannes evidently wishes to cultivate a smaller, select audience for *Problema* III, which he accomplishes in part by belaboring the determinations of the ethical universal. The audience that accompanies him to the *confinium* and beyond, he apparently believes, will share his belief that the health of the ethical sphere depends on its capacity to accommodate the claims of exceptions and singularities. Of course, this select audience is also likely to bristle at the ethical universal's imperious demand for full disclosure, which may explain why he saves this formulation of the ethical universal for *Problema* III.

Embracing the paradox

Its rhetorical success notwithstanding, Johannes' investigation in the *Problemata* has failed to advance our understanding of the faithful Abraham. So long as we treat the ethical universal as the sole arbiter of ethical truth, we are not likely to move beyond a summary indictment of Abraham and the familiar dilemma that ensues.[17]

For Johannes, as we know, this means that the ethical universal can get us no closer to the faith of Abraham than the paradox will allow. Since his only other option – losing Abraham – is unacceptable to him, he resolves in *Problema* III to renew his commitment to the paradox. At the same time, however, he is not content simply to embrace the paradox as it has emerged thus far in *Fear and Trembling*. He thus aims in *Problema* III to get clearer about the paradox itself, especially so that he might make the case for an "ethically defensible" exception to the general ban on concealment. As we shall see, in fact, his scrutiny of the paradox is also meant to motivate an immanent critique of the ethical sphere in its current incarnation.

Johannes signals his intention to interrogate the paradox by exposing the limitations of the "Hegelian philosophy,"[18] which, as we have seen, he understands as the philosophical authority behind the paradox. He thus observes that

[17] For a productive exploration of this dilemma, see Carlisle (2010), pp. 176–80; see also Carlisle's chapter in this volume.

[18] I concur here with Stewart's claim that "the odd use of Hegel in this work [i.e., *Fear and Trembling*] has very little to do with Hegel himself but is rather part of Kierkegaard's continuing polemic against Martensen and the beginning of his polemic against Heiberg" (2003, p. 306). As Stewart persuasively suggests, the intended target of Johannes' jab at the "Hegelian philosophers" is probably Heiberg (pp. 332–33).

> The Hegelian philosophy . . . is a little bemuddled when it wants to regard Abraham as the father of faith and to speak about faith. Faith is not the first immediacy but a later immediacy. (FT 82/SKS 4, 172)[19]

As this distinction suggests, Johannes apparently aims to explore the possibility of introducing a corrective to the "Hegelian philosophy," precisely so that it may acknowledge instances of immediacy other than those that are merely aesthetic.[20] In effect, that is, Johannes intends to face the "Hegelian philosophy" with a version of the dilemma that he has posed repeatedly throughout the *Problemata*: Either the "Hegelian philosophy" acknowledges faith as an extra-aesthetic instance of immediacy or it renounces Abraham as the Father of Faith.

He forwards this challenge, we might note, from his position *within* the "Hegelian philosophy," which, as we have seen, he prefers despite its limitations to the Kantian alternative. Much to our surprise, that is, Johannes locates the dynamic center of *Problema* III *internal* to the "Hegelian philosophy" itself. In doing so, moreover, he effectively tasks himself with the challenge he has posed to the "Hegelian philosophy." If he is to provide an ethical defense of Abraham's promise of divine providence, he must do so in the context of guiding the "Hegelian philosophy" toward an understanding of Abraham's faith as a later, extra-aesthetic, immediacy.[21] Apparently, that is, it is up to *him* to spur the internal development of the "Hegelian philosophy" and thereby secure its emergence from its current, "bemuddled" condition.

Here it becomes evident, moreover, that his contributions to the internal development of the "Hegelian philosophy" will provide the impetus for the immanent critique he authorizes of the ethical sphere in its current incarnation. Apparently, that is, the proposed enlargement of the ethical sphere will proceed hand-in-hand with the prescribed evolution of the "Hegelian philosophy." The consolidation of this unlikely partnership thus suggests the prospect of a consolation prize for the select audience that takes on the challenge of educating the "Hegelian philosophy." If Johannes fails in his efforts to defend Abraham's promise of divine

[19] See Perkins (1993), pp. 164–67; and Carlisle (2010), pp. 132–37. See also Carlisle's chapter in this volume.

[20] See Perkins (1993), p. 160.

[21] Blanchette (1993) makes a similar point about Johannes' complex relationship to the "Hegelian philosophy" he criticizes, pp. 39–49. See also Perkins (1993), pp. 165–68; Green (2011), pp. 161–63; Davenport (2008a), pp. 208–15; and Krishek (2009), pp. 102–07. See also the chapters by Davenport and Krishek in this volume.

providence, these readers may nevertheless reap the benefits of a spiritually fortified existence in a rejuvenated incarnation of the ethical sphere.

Johannes thus suggests that he and the "Hegelian philosophy" are similarly stalled in their respective quests for development and self-understanding. It is surely no coincidence, in fact, that his provocative challenge to the "Hegelian philosophy" immediately precedes his announcement of the venturesome approach he adopts in *Problema* III. Of course, it remains to be seen whether (or how) a philosophy attuned to the later immediacy of faith would remain properly "Hegelian" at all. I will leave for another occasion the question of whether or not Johannes in fact means to attempt a covert, and supposedly impermissible, "mediation" of the paradox (FT 82/SKS 4, 172).[22]

Ethical attunement and the tetraptych, I

Johannes' playful jab at the "Hegelian philosophy" confirms his intention to challenge the exclusive authority of the ethical universal. Although he has proceeded in the *Problemata* as if the ethical universal were uniquely expressive of the truth of the ethical sphere, he also believes that a healthy ethical sphere must accommodate the claims of singularity and particularity.[23]

On this point, we would do well to consider *Fear and Trembling* in its totality. The richly textured elaboration of its main narrative, replete with references to knights and heroes of diverse lineages, attests to Johannes' enduring interest in a class of actions that includes "ethically defensible" transgressions of general rules and prohibitions. For the most part, the heroes whom he considers are remembered for their *particular* exploits and deeds, which are neither praised nor recommended outside the tightly woven context of the heroism they bespeak. The defining exploits of these heroes are thus regarded and received as *exceptions* to the general rule. Indeed, we are now in a position to appreciate Johannes' inspirational tales of knights and heroes as ingredient to his larger efforts to educate and train his readers.[24] These tales have been intended, in part, to prepare us to receive Abraham as a kind of hero – as yet unnamed and only partially

[22] In getting clearer about the paradox, however, Johannes apparently wishes to accomplish something like a mediation of the paradox, precisely so that we may achieve an improved understanding of the faith of Abraham. See Stewart (2003), pp. 597–605.

[23] Here I follow the general line of interpretation advanced by Perkins (1993), pp. 157–60.

[24] Keeley (1993) makes a similar point about the cumulative pedagogical weight of the parables considered in *Problema* III, pp. 128–31, 152–54.

constructed – and, thus, as a doer of exceptional deeds.[25] Here it becomes clear, in fact, why Johannes feels that he must petition an alternative source of ethical justification: He is determined to isolate Abraham as a kind of hero, and the ethical universal is simply not in the business of raising heroes and excusing their transgressions.

The possibility of an "ethically defensible" exception or singularity is broached early in *Fear and Trembling*. In his introductory "Attunement,"[26] Johannes unfolds a haunting tetraptych in which he supplements his sketches of the faithless Abraham with companion sketches of a mother who resorts to deception – for example, withholding, draping, or blackening her breast – to expedite the weaning of her infant child.[27] In presenting these companion sketches, moreover, Johannes prompts his readers to understand, and ultimately to confirm, that the mother's deceptions are beyond ethical reproach. As painful as it may be for mother and child, the weaning process is depicted as a non-negotiable, natural condition of their timely separation, which in turn is presented as required for their continued growth and mutual individuation.[28] While the precise justification is left for the reader to infer (or supply), the mother's deceptions are presented as eminently defensible exceptions to the more general ethical ban on secrecy and concealment. As depicted, that is, her deceptions are simultaneously forbidden *and* permissible.[29]

The example of the weaning mother thus serves to remind us that we do in fact acknowledge exceptions to the general ethical rules to which we ordinarily adhere. We do so, moreover, at no lasting penalty either to ourselves or to the ethical sphere we inhabit. Far from polluting the ethical sphere or subverting the authority of its general prescriptions and prohibitions, the deceptions ingredient to weaning are presented as indices of a healthy, flourishing *ethos*, wherein the claims of ethical universality thrive alongside the claims of occasional exceptions and singularities. In the event that some such balance is achieved, or so we may conjecture, individuals may come to admire the ethical sphere and see their will expressed in its determinations, both universal and particular. Indeed, what is properly

[25] See Lippitt (2003), pp. 129–32.
[26] Here I prefer Hannay's translation of *Stemning*. Kierkegaard (1985), p. 44.
[27] See Keeley (1993), pp. 82–85; Mooney (1991), pp. 25–31; Williams (1998), pp. 314–18; Mulhall (2001), pp. 374–75; and Lippitt (2003), pp. 22–29. See also the chapters by Howland, Mooney and Lloyd, and Rumble in this volume.
[28] See Mooney (1991), pp. 30–31, 53–54; Williams (1998), pp. 316–17; Carlisle (2010), pp. 50–51; and Seltzer (2012), pp. 334–36. See also Mooney and Lloyd's chapter in this volume.
[29] See Derrida (1995), pp. 66–76.

universal in any such sphere is not the obedience of its inhabitants, but the respect they have for its general rules and prohibitions, even as they see fit to make and endorse occasional exceptions.

A healthy ethical sphere, Johannes thus suggests, is one in which mothers are encouraged to deceive in the service of those ethical ends that are uniquely associated with weaning. Although he does not say so, a further implication of his treatment of the weaning mother is that the residents of a healthy ethical sphere are fully capable of identifying those cases and instances that warrant exceptional treatment. In doing so, moreover, these residents exercise their discretionary judgment, thereby asserting their authority to judge such cases – whether novel or well known – as they see fit. Indeed, an ethical sphere in which occasional exceptions are both allowed and celebrated is not likely to produce adherents who, like Johannes' contemporaries as he describes them, are reluctant to exercise their discretionary judgment.

Inasmuch as this tetraptych appears under the heading of "Attunement," we reasonably may conclude that we are meant to attune our judgments and intuitions to the exceptions depicted in these sketches.[30] Having done so, presumably, we will understand (or be reminded) that the ethical universal only ever expresses the partial truth of the ethical sphere. The full truth of the ethical sphere also comprises those particular cases that warrant exceptions to the familiar expressions of ethical universality. By definition, of course, these exceptions cannot be deduced from more general principles; nor can they be justified as such from outside the ethical sphere. One knows them to be exceptional only from *within* the ethical community or tradition that the ethical sphere is supposed to nurture. As we apparently are meant to understand, in fact, becoming familiar with these "ethically defensible" exceptions, and attuning our faculty of judgment to the weight and relevance they bear, is part of what it means to belong to a thriving ethical community or tradition.

These exceptions thus serve as fixed points of reference within the ethical sphere in which one is educated, trained, and nurtured. As such, they require no further justification and defense, and it is not clear what kind of justification they might receive should someone inquire.[31] To be sure, the mother's deceptions might be defended as producing salutary

[30] Here I follow the general line of interpretation developed by Hannay in Kierkegaard (1985), pp. 13–14 and Mooney (1991, pp. 25–31). In place of Mooney's lyrical interpretation of "attunement" (or "tuning up"), however, I pursue an ethical interpretation that is suggested by the titular question of *Problema* III.

[31] Here I follow Stern (2003), pp. 38–40.

consequences, or as conforming to nature's provident plan.[32] Yet neither account would explain why this particular practice of deception is defensible while others, which also promise beneficial consequences or conformity to nature, are not. Ultimately, that is, these exceptions are permissible simply because we have determined (or confirmed) them to be "ethically defensible." This is the source of the normative, poetic authority that Johannes seeks to awaken in his best readers.

In any event, Johannes evinces no interest either in probing these fixed points of reference or in demanding of them any further justification. His point here is simply to acquaint his readers with their ongoing reliance on some such fixed points of reference, even as they also honor the pronouncements of the ethical universal. Revisiting these exceptions on occasion, as Johannes bids us to do in his "Attunement," will not only remind us of the depth of the ethical training we have received, but also prepare us to exercise with crescent confidence our capacity for discretionary judgment. This lesson will be especially useful as we accompany Johannes on the adventure he envisions for *Problema* III, which, as we have seen, is meant to determine if Abraham was justified in concealing his aims from Isaac. In the end, he hopes, we will accept his defense of Abraham's promise of divine providence and judge the concealment accomplished by it as an "ethically defensible" exception to the general rule.

Johannes apparently has larger designs as well. While attuning ourselves to the exceptional status of the deceptions practiced by the weaning mother, we are likely to find ourselves becoming attuned more generally to an ethical sphere in which specific exceptions and singularities are understood to complement, rather than compromise, its general laws and prohibitions.[33] Under the aegis of this more general register of attunement, we are likely to develop a heightened appreciation of these fixed points of reference and their role in sustaining the health of the ethical sphere in which we (wish to) reside. Eventually, that is, our attention to these fixed points of reference may lead us to see them as ethical resources

[32] See Williams (1998), pp. 314–17.

[33] Similar claims about the complex role of the ethical in *Fear and Trembling* have been advanced by Mackey (1986), pp. 47–54; Mulhall (2001), pp. 380–87; Green (2011), pp. 167–79; and Krishek (2009), pp. 101–08. See also Hannay's chapter in this volume. Several of these claims are judiciously considered by Lippitt (2003), pp. 168–71; and Davenport (2008a), pp. 206–15. My aim in this section, and my intended contribution to this debate, is to link the rejuvenation of the ethical sphere to the accommodation of "ethically defensible" acts of concealment. The result, I believe, is a "bottom-up" account of ethical enlargement that need not (but may) depend on the soteriological and anagogic considerations emphasized by the scholars mentioned above.

in their own right, and to cherish them as such. For example, we eventually may come to regard the hybrid forms arrayed throughout the *confinium* as valuable ethical resources, much as Johannes prompts us to do. In this respect, in fact, we may be justified in understanding Johannes' larger aims in *Fear and Trembling* to include an attempt to reintroduce his best readers to the neglected practice of ethical husbandry.

Presumably, moreover, our attention to these fixed points of reference may embolden us to envision (and perhaps also to demand) for ourselves an enlarged ethical sphere, whose resident wisdom would exceed the pronouncements of its general laws and prohibitions. The desired outcome, I take it, would involve a rejuvenation rather than a rejection of the ethical sphere, predicated on a sober assessment of the moral and spiritual benefits of particular acts of concealment. If Johannes has his way, for example, this project of rejuvenation will include a reconsideration of the status of the aesthetic–ethical *confinium*, as well as a concerted retrieval of the disowned resources currently housed in the *confinium*. The inhabitants of this enlarged ethical sphere would be treated less (and less often) like children, for whom strict rules and non-negotiable prohibitions are necessary, and more like adults, who are encouraged to exercise their judgment in making difficult decisions.[34] While it is likely that life in this enlarged ethical sphere would be more precarious, the attraction of the enhanced spirituality available therein would trump many or most concerns. Within such a sphere, presumably, Johannes and his readers would grow and mature in spirit, love, compassion, and imagination. They would risk themselves for their faith, and they would work out the terms of their salvation in *genuine* (as opposed to *manufactured*) fear and trembling.

Ethical attunement and the tetraptych, II

A parallel process of attunement is suggested by the four sketches featuring Abraham and Isaac. In each sketch, we are meant to acknowledge (and perhaps also to regret) Abraham's lack of faith, which yields the four alternative conclusions to the story of the *Akedah*.[35]

At the same time, we apparently are meant to acknowledge the ethical aims served by Abraham's deceptions (or silences), while also taking note

[34] See Seltzer (2012), pp. 339–42.
[35] See Carlisle (2010), pp. 46–50. See also Carlisle's and Mooney and Lloyd's chapters in this volume.

of the personal losses he incurs as a result. The faithless Abraham may be closer to our experience, reminiscent perhaps of other heroes or fathers whom we admire, but he is not *great* in the sense reserved for him by Johannes. He is, in fact, disappointingly similar to (the best among) us, especially inasmuch as he is both ethically resourceful and religiously derelict. The problem with the faithless Abraham, at least as depicted by Johannes, is that he is not the Abraham whom we rightly admire. What is missing, of course, is also what is most essential: the singularity of his faith. We may deem his deceptions and silences commendable – and, thus, as importantly similar to the deceptions performed by the weaning mother – but we also recognize them as indicative of his religious limitations. As such, his deceptions and silences cannot be said to elevate or ennoble the ethical sphere. In this case, that is, we are meant to attune ourselves to the faith of Abraham in its obtrusive absence, precisely so that we might resist the temptation posed by the faithless alternatives depicted in the tetraptych.

These parallel processes of attunement converge, from opposite directions, on the nebulous set of "ethically defensible" exceptions that Johannes seeks to illuminate in *Problema* III. The weaning mother is to be praised for transgressing the cold, officious pronouncements of the ethical universal, while the faithless Abraham is to be rued for yielding in each case to the "temptation" posed by a (merely) ethical existence. While both exemplars express the truth of the ethical sphere, their cases are very different. On the one hand, the weaning mother enlarges the ethical, elevating it beyond the limits of its most familiar universal expressions. In doing so, moreover, she attunes us to the precious, precarious life that the ethical sphere is meant (but sometimes fails) to nurture. On the other hand, the faithless Abraham in each case demeans the ethical by treating it as a safe haven from the terrifying demands of religious faith. In doing so, he attunes us to the gulf that separates him (and us) from his faithful counterpart.

Together, these parallel processes of attunement prepare us to behold the faithful Abraham whom Johannes hopes to isolate in the *Problemata*. Unlike the faithless Abrahams depicted in the "Attunement," the faithful Abraham must face up to his religious obligations and refuse the temptation posed by a merely ethical existence. Like the weaning mother, the faithful Abraham must conceal his aims in such a way as to ennoble the ethical sphere itself, challenging it from within to aspire to a higher truth and an enlarged incarnation. Indeed, here we are reminded of Johannes' tantalizing suggestion, regarding the teleological suspension of the ethical,

that "[what] is suspended is not relinquished but is preserved in the higher, which is its *telos*" (FT 54/SKS 4, 148).[36] By remaining true to the ethical in its enlarged incarnation, that is, the faithful Abraham elevates its status even as he raises himself above its familiar sphere of jurisdiction. Only in that event, or so we apparently are meant to understand, should we be prepared to deem Abraham's act of concealment an "ethically defensible" exception to the pronouncement of the ethical universal.

Here it becomes clear, in fact, that our attention to the "ethically defensible" exceptions illuminated in the "Attunement" is an important component of the regimen of education and training in which Johannes has endeavored to enroll his best readers. Our consideration of the companion sketches displayed in the tetraptych is meant to prepare us, eventually, to extend the range of our attunement to the concealments perpetrated by the faithful Abraham. Indeed, our task in *Problema* III is to determine if Abraham's concealments belong to the same class of "ethically defensible" exceptions as the deceptions perpetrated by the weaning mother. Toward this end, we are urged to contemplate the parallel that is adumbrated in the tetraptych: Might the faithful Abraham be viewed in any valuable respect as a paternal counterpart to the weaning mother, as similarly involved in an "ethically defensible" act of concealment? For example, is the end to which he deceives – namely, the binding of Isaac – comparable to the end to which the mother deceives – namely, the unbinding of mother and child? More importantly, especially in light of the narrative and dramatic development of *Problema* III, are we justified in treating Abraham's promise of divine providence as contributing to the weaning (or "weaning") of Isaac and the mutual individuation of father and son?[37] If so, the particular act of concealment involved in this promise may qualify as an "ethically defensible" exception to the general ban on secrets and lies.

What becomes clear in this context is the extent to which Johannes complicates his task by holding out for a recognizably *ethical* defense of Abraham's promise of divine providence.[38] Others, we know, have moved directly to affirm a *religious* justification of Abraham's concealment and, more generally, of his journey to Moriah. Luther, for example, not only

[36] See Davenport (2008a), pp. 206–12; and Green (2011), pp. 157–67. See also Davenport's, Lippitt's, and Hannay's chapters in this volume.

[37] As suggested, for example, by Keeley (1993), pp. 83–85; and Mooney (1991), pp. 30–31. See also Mooney and Lloyd's chapter in this volume.

[38] For an alternative interpretation of the "ethical," see Hanson's contribution to this volume, pp. 239–41.

commends Abraham for lying to Isaac,[39] but also justifies the entire episode as guiding father and son toward the overarching realization that "death is life."[40] Luther's interpretation is in fact representative of a familiar consequentialist strategy, wherein the (religious) end is understood to justify the (immoral) means employed in its attainment. An obvious attraction of this interpretive strategy is the license it grants its adherents to bracket their ethical qualms about Abraham as they glory in the religious bounty he reaps at the supposedly happy ending of this grisly story. In short, we might be inclined to conclude, all's well that ends well.

No such conclusion is available to Johannes. In asking after the *ethical* status of Abraham's concealments, he forfeits his access to the religious interpretation favored by Luther and others. As a result, he is not in a position to excuse Abraham's ethical lapses, particularly with respect to Isaac, as belonging to the collateral damage caused by his progress toward a moment of religious triumph. What is more, Johannes has consistently asserted the irreducibly ethical content of the familial obligations that devolve to Abraham as a husband and father. Presumably, this means that any ethical defense of his concealments, or of his journey to Moriah more generally, must take into account the devastation visited upon Sarah, Eliezer, Isaac, and the familial relationships that formerly bound them to him.[41] If anything, in fact, the ethical life of the family appears to be the primary casualty of Abraham's practice of serial concealment.[42] But even if the ethical life of the family somehow survived the fateful journey to Moriah, it is not at all clear how Abraham's concealments might be understood to have preserved the ethical and elevated it toward its *telos*. So although we might be inclined to laud Johannes for undertaking an ethical defense of Abraham, his efforts toward this end remain inconclusive and obscure.

Conclusion

The larger problem for Johannes in *Problema* III is that the ethical attunement prescribed in *Fear and Trembling* does not obviously resonate with the faith of Abraham. Even when expanded in accordance with the training regimen developed by Johannes for the select audience of *Problema* III, the attunement he recommends does not bridge the gulf that

[39] According to Luther (1964), "Abraham does not want to torment his son with a long torture and trial. Therefore he does not yet disclose that Isaac himself must die" (p. 112).
[40] Luther (1964), pp. 118–19. See also Carlisle's chapter in this volume.
[41] See Katz (2003), pp. 115–25; and Stern (2003), pp. 41–42. [42] Katz (2003), pp. 108–15.

separates his readers from the faithful Abraham. The proposed extension of an already strained analogy fails, in short, because the faith of Abraham proves to be predictably evanescent. The ethical ends served by his promise of divine providence remain unknown to us, perhaps because they remain external to our experience.

Part of the problem here, according to Johannes, is that our experience of the ethical – and, so, our capacity for amplified ethical attunement – is woefully impoverished. As products and reflections of "an age that has crossed out passion in order to serve science" (FT 7/SKS 4, 103), we may require a protracted period of ethical rehabilitation before we are able to apply ourselves in earnest to the task of expanding the range of our attunement. In that event, Johannes' excursion to the aesthetic–ethical *confinium* may serve as a useful model for the course of remediation that lies ahead for us.[43]

Another part of the problem lies, however, in the nature of the attunement that would enable us to determine that Abraham's promise of divine providence qualifies as an "ethically defensible" exception. According to Johannes, Abraham's supposed ethical aims are hidden behind the iron curtain of divine irony, his *incognito* impervious to mortal onlookers (FT 117–19/SKS 4, 205–07). This means that no degree of hermeneutical acumen or dialectical finesse will position us to confirm any conjectures we might form about Abraham. We are not able to expand the range of our attunement as we (may) have done in the past, for the divine irony of Abraham affords us neither the purchase nor the anchorage that would secure the desired expansion. As Johannes occasionally acknowledges in *Fear and Trembling*, the faith of Abraham defies all efforts to construct a stable analogy. As presented by Johannes, in fact, Abraham appears to be the ultimate hybrid figure, partaking simultaneously of all three spheres of existence.[44]

Apparently, then, the final stage in the prescribed expansion of the range of our ethical attunement, the stage wherein we might pronounce Abraham's promise of divine providence to be "ethically defensible," marks the practical limit of our renewed practice of ethical husbandry. The rehabilitation of neglected ethical resources, including those arrayed throughout the *confinium*, is a necessary condition of responding in the affirmative to the titular question of *Problema* III, but it is not a sufficient condition of

[43] For an interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* as a work of therapeutic aspiration, see Hanson's chapter in this volume.

[44] See the chapters by Mooney and Lloyd, and Hanson in this volume.

doing so. Even our best efforts to revive and enlarge the ethical sphere of existence will fail to deliver us to the desired appreciation of the ethical aims of Abraham's promise. The reason for this is that Abraham's concealments, unlike the deceptions perpetrated by the weaning mother, are not yet – and in fact may never become – fixed points of reference within the accepted topography of our ethical sphere. Despite his undisputed religious prominence, that is, Abraham remains an ethically enigmatic figure. As yet, we have arrived at no consensus that Abraham's controversial promise of divine providence warrants an exception to the general ban on concealment. As we recall, even Johannes could not resist the temptation to remind his readers of what Abraham *might* have said in response to Isaac's question: *You are the one intended* (FT 118/SKS 4, 206).[45]

What is needed, apparently, is for a poet to emerge who will do for Abraham what predecessor poets have done for Agamemnon and other heroes – namely, to persuade posterity that an obvious ethical transgression in fact qualifies as an "ethically defensible" exception. Despite his protestations to the contrary, this may have been one of Johannes' aims in *Fear and Trembling*. That he is a gifted poet is apparent from the tetraptych he presents in his "Attunement," and from his depictions in his "Preliminary Expectoration" of the knights of faith and infinite resignation.[46] Notwithstanding the clumsy conclusion that Johannes arranges for *Problema* III, moreover, it is probably too soon to judge his encomium a failure. His efforts may require the reinforcement of successor poets, whose collective encomia may take centuries or millennia to become firmly rooted in the ethical tradition(s) named for Abraham. For now, in any event, it is safe to say that Johannes has not yet succeeded in his poetic venture, if this is in fact what he meant to accomplish in *Fear and Trembling*.

At the same time, however, we cannot simply give up, especially if we belong to that select readership that cannot be done with Abraham. If, like Johannes, we have no choice but to persevere in our efforts to get clearer about the paradox, then we must gird ourselves, potentially, for the task of a lifetime. Presumably, this will involve us in an indefinite continuation of our attempts to expand the range of our ethical attunement. Our goal in doing so would be to accommodate Abraham's promise of divine providence, even though the ethical aspirations that inform his practice of

[45] See Conway (2008), pp. 182–86.

[46] I assume here that his occasional disavowals of the title of "poet" are either ironic/tactical, uninformed, or insincere. As Louis Mackey said of Kierkegaard, Johannes is certainly a "kind of poet," even if the kind in question defies easy classification.

concealment are likely to remain opaque to us. We must continue, that is, despite our understanding that we are not likely to discover Abraham's ethical aims. In practical terms, this may involve little more than a steadfast refusal to be done with Abraham, as we continue to struggle to muster an ethical defense of his practice of concealment.

My sense of Kierkegaard is that he does not object to, and perhaps even cherishes, the indefinitely indeterminate status of Abraham within the tradition and practice of Christianity. While he clearly opposes the hypocrisy and cowardice that typically inform ethical considerations of Abraham – witness the takedown he authorizes of the feckless preacher described in the "Preliminary Expectoration" – he gives no indication of expecting to arrive at a fixed and final determination of Abraham's ethical status. Apparently, that is, Abraham's promise of divine providence is to be pondered, probed, considered, and revisited indefinitely, perhaps over the duration of a lifetime or many lifetimes.[47] Doing so will no doubt produce in his readers bouts of insomnia, anxiety, distress, and loneliness, much as it has done in the case of Johannes. Evidently, however, Kierkegaard does not consider these afflictions to be fatal objections to the ongoing task of understanding Abraham.

On precisely this point, of course, Kierkegaard and Johannes part company, though perhaps not permanently. Finally yielding to the temptation of a (merely) ethical existence, Johannes abandons his quest for Abraham. Citing his disqualifying lack of "courage" (FT 120/SKS 4, 207), he steers *Problema* III toward a hastily arranged (and disingenuously evangelical) conclusion.[48] He reappears in the Epilogue in his familiar role of witty social critic, but he also appears chastened by his experience. His final allusion, ostensibly to Cratylus, in fact suggests that he may have gone overboard in his zeal to convict those who aspire to "go further" than faith. Of course, we will never know if he has learned this, or any, lesson from his miscarried quest for Abraham. Any further repetitions, whether forward or backward, will be ours to conduct.

[47] As suggested by Luther (1964), pp. 117–18. See also Carlisle's chapter in this volume.
[48] Derrida (1995), pp. 80–81. See also Conway (2008), pp. 187–93.

CHAPTER 12

'He speaks in tongues': hearing the truth of Abraham's words of faith

Jeffrey Hanson

This chapter examines the exact manner in which Abraham expresses his faith in the words he utters in Genesis chapter 22, verse 8, words that occupy Johannes de Silentio's attention in the closing pages of *Fear and Trembling*: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering."[1] I will argue that these words both in form and in content encapsulate one of the key features of Abraham's faith. They give voice to a trust *that* God will provide while remaining completely indeterminate with respect to *how* God will provide. I read the final utterance of Abraham therefore as a model of all communication about faith, including the text of *Fear and Trembling* itself. Insofar as Abraham speaks words about faith that are both true and beautiful, and insofar as he himself does not fully grasp the meaning of his own words, or his own words gesture toward a truth that eludes his grasp and the grasp of any traditional discourse, philosophical or poetic, he provides the paradigm not just for faith itself but also for all intelligible talk about faith.[2] I have two aims that once achieved will secure this overall thesis: first, to clarify the mode in which the text is to be read – both literally and figuratively and neither at once – and second, to demonstrate that the apparent factual error contained in Abraham's utterance – that a lamb is *not* provided for the sacrifice but a ram instead – is a

[1] FT 102/SKS 4, 203. All citations from the text of *Fear and Trembling* refer to *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[2] That Abraham's speech is intelligible is in fact stipulated by the text, though its intelligibility is not that of discourses that address only objective truth. Readings of *Fear and Trembling* that regard Abraham as hermetically sealed off from *all* intelligibility overstate the issue and neglect the final qualified assurances of Johannes that "insofar as I can understand the paradox I can also understand Abraham's total presence in that word" (FT 104/SKS 4, 206); "it appears that one may well understand Abraham, but only in the way one understands the paradox. For my part, I can perhaps understand Abraham" (FT 105/SKS 4, 207); and "I presumably can understand it, presumably in a certain sense can understand Abraham in what was said, yet without thereby coming any closer to him than I have previously" (FT 104/SKS 4, 205). If Abraham were *completely* incomprehensible, then there would be no point in writing *Fear and Trembling*.

marker for the way in which flexibility about the vindication of faith is inherent to all speech about faith.

The jumping-off point for the case I will make is furnished by Stephen Mulhall, who raises key problems I wish to address, and an intriguing essay from David Kangas, which is not on *Fear and Trembling* but that I wish to apply to that text in order to deepen the analysis and craft a reading of Abraham's final utterance that will address some of the difficulties raised by Mulhall, who puts forward two objections relevant to this study: first, that Johannes ultimately directs his readers toward an allegorical reading, contra his apparent advocacy for literal interpretation, and second, that in any event Abraham's utterance includes a factual mistake about the outcome of God's provision.

"Going off the rails"

Stephen Mulhall argues that Johannes' stated preference for literalism is a ruse designed to bait the reader into working a bit harder on extracting the meaning of *Fear and Trembling*, a meaning which is actually allegorical and not literal at all. The problem that inspires his analysis is that even if Abraham's utterance is deliberately ambivalent, the two valences referred to in that utterance both fail to obtain:

> despite the care his [Johannes'] Abraham takes to balance his utterance between two possible futures – one in which Isaac is the lamb which God provides for the sacrifice, and one in which God provides a lamb to be used for the sacrifice in place of Isaac – neither of them is in fact realized. Isaac, of course, turns out not to be the envisaged lamb; but God provides as an alternative not a lamb but a ram (caught in a thicket by his horns). In the most obvious, literal sense, therefore, Abraham's prediction or prophecy is simply wrong.[3]

That it is so is a serious problem for Johannes, Mulhall goes on to argue, because Johannes is at pains throughout the work to defend literalistic readings of Scripture, and here we have a reading from Johannes himself that practically *depends* on a literal error or misdirection for its sense. The nub then of this problem is that Johannes says he favors the literal, but his own interpretation of Abraham's words neglects the fact that they are literally incorrect, and this is no minor error but cuts to the core of Johannes' entire argument, inasmuch as according to Mulhall, "it is not

[3] Mulhall (2001), p. 363.

obvious that there could be a worse error in a reading of the Genesis narrative than literal inaccuracy; for throughout *Fear and Trembling* it is deviations from the literal that attract his deepest scorn."[4]

On the prior page, Mulhall asks rhetorically whether it matters "that the animal God provides is a mature rather than a young member of the species Abraham specifies" and answers that far from this objection being "a little too pedestrian to be convincing," on the contrary, "absolutely everything turns on the fact that God's actions on Mount Moriah do not literally fulfil Abraham's prophecy."[5]

I actually think this specific objection concerning "lamb" versus "ram," two terms that in fact in Hebrew do not pick out representatives of two different species, is indeed too pedestrian to be convincing. Furthermore, it seems to me that a typological reading of Abraham and Isaac as prefiguring the action of God in Jesus Christ (a reading both Mulhall and Lippitt endorse) is perfectly secure without this apparent inconsistency, that is, one does not need this to be a major issue in order to plausibly read the story typologically. However, I do agree with Lippitt that this is the most

[4] *Ibid*., p. 364. I actually question this claim by Mulhall as well. The mistake made by the thoughtless preacher lampooned by Silentio in the 'Preliminary Outpouring' is that he allows for an overly literal appropriation of Abraham's example to seem attractive and plausible to one of his listeners. Mulhall's diagnosis, that the thoughtless preacher "fails to appreciate the literal import of his own words, and hence, the literal significance of the biblical narrative upon which he has been preaching" (p. 365) is not quite accurate. It would be more precise to say that Johannes is interested in underscoring, in his own words, the fact that "it is only by faith that one acquires a resemblance to Abraham, not by murder" (p. 35). The preacher's problem is not, as Mulhall would have it, "failing to take the literal meaning of his own words, and those of the Bible, seriously" (p. 365). His problem is that he has omitted the essential, a point clarified by Johannes' reference to love. "If one makes love into a fleeting mood, a sensual feeling in a person, then one only lays snares for the weak by talking about the achievements of love. Everyone, to be sure, has momentary feelings, but if everyone therefore would do the dreadful thing that love has sanctified as an immortal achievement, then everything is lost, both the achievement and the one led astray" (p. 31). The preacher has led his listener astray by failing to be clear about what faith is in the first place, reducing it to a matter of bare, external imitation rather than inner appropriation, just as encomia to love that hold it up as nothing more than passing fancy betray both love itself and the effort to exhort listeners to be more loving. Only once in *Fear and Trembling* does Johannes explicitly appeal to the need to understand the Bible "literally" (*efter ordene*), and that is in his discussion of Luke 14:26, in *Problema* II; but even in that case Johannes proceeds to furnish an interpretation of the "hard saying" of Jesus that is not obviously literal at all, a tension I explore elsewhere.

[5] *Ibid*., pp. 363–64. So too John Lippitt notes in his engagement with Mulhall that the latter "anticipates but resists the possible objection that the fact that the sacrificial animal is a mature rather than a young member of the species is 'a little too pedestrian to be convincing'" and concludes, "I think he is right to do so. From a Christian perspective, the fact that Abraham's utterance has a prophetic dimension of which he is unaware is deeply significant: the lamb that God provides will turn out to be Christ, the 'Lamb of God.' But even from Johannes' own perspective, Abraham's failure to avoid literal falsehood should be significant, since as we have seen in his discussion of the evasive preacher and the Luke passage, Johannes insists on the importance of *the literal*. A focus on this fact is, in my view, the single most important aspect of Mulhall's critique." Lippitt (2003), p. 196.

important aspect of Mulhall's critique, and I do think it worth some critical attention, not because this particular deviation is as telling as both of them think it is, but because it remains the case that intrinsic to Abraham's prophetic utterance is a kind of elasticity at the least if not an outright factual error, an elasticity that is an important ingredient in Abraham's faith. Whatever we wish to call the ram that the Lord provides, there is a crucial sense in which Abraham's words point to an eventuality that does come to pass but not in the sense in which his words intended, and this dynamic I will argue is essential to all language about faith, even the language of *Fear and Trembling* itself.

Mulhall contends that Johannes puts forward in the end a reading of Abraham's story that prefigures a quite orthodox version of Christianity; the real importance of Abraham and Isaac according to Mulhall's reading of Johannes is that they are types of God the Father and God the Son incarnate as Jesus the Christ.[6] Johannes' periodic insistence on reading Scripture literally then strategically and surreptitiously undercuts what is in the end itself a grand allegorical reading of Scripture, an undercutting that Mulhall says amounts to Johannes "going off the rails."[7] Specifically, Mulhall asserts that Johannes goes off the rails in two related matters, and this convergence is Mulhall's way of answering what he admits must be a question for his interpretation at this final stage of his commentary. He concedes that his argument so far "simply encapsulate[s] the most orthodox Christian interpretation of Abraham's ordeal. Why, then, should de Silentio's overt interpretative trajectory have taken him so far from these familiar reference points?"[8] Mulhall is clear that Johannes' desire to exhort his contemporaries to a careful reading of the biblical text is a legitimate one, but he cautions against Johannes' apparent selectivity in preferring the literal to other possible ways of reading: "However, somewhere between this initiating experience and problema III de Silentio's legitimate desire to return contemporary believers to a careful reading of the biblical texts is transformed into the principle that the only legitimate mode of interpreting those texts is in accordance with its literal meaning."[9] On the basis of this concern, Mulhall in his own voice concludes, "Interpretation by analogy does not presuppose, as de Silentio seems sometimes to assume, that 'basically everything is the same'; on the contrary, it contends that the specificity of a text, the full depth of its distinctiveness and difference from other texts, emerges only when we move from the level of literal meaning to that of the figurative."[10]

[6] Mulhall (2001), pp. 379–80. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 380. [8] *Ibid.* [9] *Ibid.*, p. 381. [10] *Ibid.*

The second pivot point at which Johannes careens off the rails is one that is not unrelated and indeed that Mulhall thinks links up with the first pivot point at precisely the locus of Abraham's utterance. This second point concerns the repeated moments at which "in order to preserve the distinctiveness of the religious and the ethical realms, he [Johannes] applies Hegelian dialectics to Abraham's ordeal."[11] Framing each of the *problemata* in terms of an ostensible challenge to Hegelian logic, Mulhall reads Johannes as flatly contradicting the Hegelian identification of the ethical and the religious: "in his desire to contradict the Hegelian equation of the religious and the ethical, de Silentio constructs a depiction of Abraham (and hence of faith) by simply negating three Hegelian claims about the ethical. But he thereby leaves the accuracy of those original claims unquestioned."[12] In other words, by simply inverting the Hegelian cadre, Johannes leaves intact that very cadre, fails to question its fundamental logic but by simply reversing it leaves its basic terms entirely in force. The case of the Abraham utterance reveals with particular vividness the fact that Johannes has not fundamentally disrupted the Hegelian problematic, just simply overturned it: "de Silentio's idea that Abraham cannot speak, that his faith is an offence against the *logos* (as manifest in reason and in discourse), merely inverts and hence implicitly presupposes the Hegelian notion that the domain of the ethical and the domain of the universal are one and the same."[13]

"Not a metaphor"

What I would like to do in this section is to work backward through Mulhall's case, beginning with a question for his claim that Johannes leaves undisturbed the Hegelian identification of religion and ethics.[14] If this is a problem, that Johannes has left in place a basic Hegelian principle, then I submit the same criticism can be leveled against Mulhall himself, who leaves in place a bedrock Hegelian principle, namely, that the literal or conceptual and the figurative or metaphorical are insurmountably heterogeneous and prioritized, with the conceptual of course always higher than the metaphorical. Mulhall leaves in place this basic opposition, while

[11] *Ibid*. [12] *Ibid*., p. 382. [13] *Ibid*.

[14] I actually think John Lippitt has given us some very good independent reasons for thinking that Johannes is precisely putting into question this identification; the opening salvos of each problema may in fact be less stipulations than postulates that are being presented specifically in order to be challenged by what follows. On the basis of his argument to that effect (presented in Lippitt 2003, ch. 6), Lippitt – correctly, I think – concludes that Mulhall's reading is much weakened (pp. 202–04).

asserting the rights of the metaphorical or allegorical against the literal, thereby inverting, without fundamentally questioning, a Hegelian orthodoxy.

In so doing I apply the insights of David Kangas, who articulates in one of his articles what he calls the logic of the gift.[15] Keying off one of the edifying discourses on James 1:17 (incidentally Kierkegaard's favorite Bible verse), Kangas takes note of Kierkegaard's puzzling contention that calling God or the Good "gift" is not a metaphor. "What is the good?" Kierkegaard writes. "It is God. Who is the one who gives it? It is God. Why is the good a gift and this expression not a metaphor but the only real and true expression?"[16] As Kangas argues, ordinarily a term like "Good," with its impeccable philosophical pedigree, would seem to belong to the realm of conceptual clarity, while the term "gift" would seem to be merely a figure of speech, an illustration of the primary and transparent meaning captured by "Good." Such an illustration could of course be a way of condescending to limited understanding or an aid to imagination, but it could not be elevated to the same rank as the concept – at best it would be a metonymy, "gift" as a specific good or kind of good standing for the Good itself. "Kierkegaard's elevation of what *would be* an image to the status of what *appears to be* a literal expression or proper name thus has to be accounted for,"[17] particularly since as Kangas goes on to point out, the Hegelian backdrop of this opposition would have been firmly in Kierkegaard's mind. As we all know, for Hegel only the concept captures the absolute, and the concept both opposes and dominates all representation. Metaphor, image, must be expunged for the concept to achieve itself, an achievement that preserves the content of the representation but dispenses with its merely extrinsic and thus disposable form. Again Kierkegaard is far from ignorant of this Hegelian structure, and he shares Hegel's concern over the merely extrinsic or the figurative *simpliciter*. In another discourse Kierkegaard raises a question for his own use of the term "father" in connection with God. Again in this passage he claims that speaking of God as "father" is not metaphorical: "the inner being understands and is convinced that God is a Father in heaven and that this expression is not metaphorical, imperfect, but the truest and most literal expression."[18]

At the same time, Kierkegaard cautions against understanding God to be a father as *merely* figurative, either: "But if the expression is figurative, metaphorical, does it actually reach up to heaven to describe what it is supposed to describe, or does it not dwindle away the higher it ascends,

[15] Kangas (2001), pp. 100–20. [16] EUD 134. [17] Kangas (2001), p. 110. [18] EUD 99.

like an earthly longing, which always speaks only obscurely. Yes, to one who looks at the external, the expression remains figurative and unreal."[19] Indeed, Kierkegaard goes on to argue that for one who looks only at the external, one who does not appropriate the truth in inward transformation, *truth itself is just a metaphor*.[20] For such a person speaking of God as father will seem to entail too great a loss of gifts lesser than the gift of God's own self, and for such a person the truth is only what she makes of it: Sometimes God will seem like a loving father, sometimes not, because she judges by the human standard of what counts as fatherliness rather than admitting that God is the one true father and all earthly fathers, no matter how excellent, pale imitations of the one in heaven. For her the truth is as compelling as the metaphor of earthly fatherhood in which she trusts, and no more so.[21]

So since Kierkegaard is just as attuned as Hegel is to the dangers of the merely metaphorical, he cannot possibly agree with Mulhall that textual meaning "emerges only when we move from the level of literal meaning to that of the figurative," for such a move would utterly fail to outfox the Hegelian schema and would court the legitimate danger of falling wholly into the merely "figurative and unreal." This is why Kangas says, in a formula that unwittingly opposes almost exactly Mulhall's contention, "What Kierkegaard resists is a strategy which, while remaining entirely within the opposition between metaphor and concept, would seek to substitute a figurative discourse on the absolute for a conceptual one. Such a discourse, dwindling away like a vapor, would remain improper and non-actual. And, certainly, it could exercise no critical power with respect to the Hegelian concept."[22]

If Kierkegaard's discourse is genuinely to assault the Hegelian schema, then it must not simply reprioritize the literal and figurative: It must aim at a transformative truth that precedes the difference between the literal and the figurative. If Kangas is right, then, contra Mulhall, Kierkegaard does advance a way of reading that fundamentally disrupts the Hegelian schema. Kangas nowhere in his article mentions *Fear and Trembling*, but his description of how the edifying discourses handle what he calls "absolute figures" like "gift" and "father" I believe can be fruitfully applied to some of the contentious passages in that text. Kangas holds a nuanced position that certain operative concepts/images in Kierkegaard are neither strictly literal nor strictly figurative but both and neither at once:

[19] *Ibid*. [20] *Ibid*. [21] *Ibid*., 99–100. [22] Kangas (2001), p. 111.

> The properness or literality that Kierkegaard refers to—i.e. that gift and father are not metaphors but expressions of actuality—is not the same thing as a hardening of the image or a forgetfulness of its status as an image. In fact, the literality at issue is, so to speak, non-literal. To be precise, it is a literality that is no longer the opposite of a figurality. Or, conversely, what is at issue is a figurality that is no longer the opposite of a literal meaning. According to Kierkegaard's usage, gift and father *are* figurative, but they are not *figurative* of anything more proper. The figurativeness is not derived but something original.[23]

This complex dynamic can shed some light on *Fear and Trembling*'s targeting of a meaning that is neither wholly literal nor wholly figurative. Such a meaning would compel the inner person, the person subject to transformation and edification, to reappraise their relationship to the vicissitudes of life. "For the inner being," Kierkegaard writes in the discourse on God as father, "the human distinction between what might be called gift and what language is not inclined to designate as gift vanishes in the essential, in the giver; for the inner being, joy and sorrow, good and bad fortune, distress and victory are gifts."[24] Ultimately then there is a consolatory power to the paradoxical truth that evades the strict Hegelian division between literal and figurative and insuperable elevation of the conceptual over the representative. This paradoxical truth reorients our natural impulses to discriminate between joy and sorrow, good and bad fortune, good and bad fatherhood, to name them according to distinguishable criteria, criteria in which the one who judges externally trusts more than the God who is truly gift and father. For the inner person, all is gift. This expression is not a metaphor. But it is not meant to be taken literally either.

"The lord will provide"

Suppose then that the utterance of Abraham can be read in similar fashion. Mulhall's concern that it should be read allegorically rather than literally has already been addressed: It should be read neither allegorically alone nor literally alone but with a view to uncovering a truth that is available only as a gift to the inner person, where the individual is transformed by an encounter with the truth that is irreducible to discrete orders of discourse.[25] This way of reading helps address the second issue that must be

[23] *Ibid*. [24] EUD 99.

[25] This I suggest is how we should read the subtitle of *Fear and Trembling*: "dialectical lyric." Commentators often note the apparent hybridity of this designation and its blending of genres,

confronted to support my thesis, the concern, shared by Mulhall and Lippitt, that Abraham's utterance contains a factual error.

This issue too, however, can be resolved if we surpass the literal and the metaphorical both. The ultimate point of Abraham's speech is that he must in the end speak in a way that tenuously holds to both the ethical and the aesthetic in reasserted forms in such a way that his speech will be unconventionally a form of utterance that provides consolation amid a reimagined fidelity to reinterpreted ideals of the true and beautiful. Let us start from the beginning and examine with some precision how exactly Johannes accounts for Abraham's inability to speak, which is set against two other forms of non-utterance: the withholding of speech in defiance of ethical responsibility and the withholding of speech in deference to aesthetic fittingness. The whole cavalcade of characters introduced in *Problema* III is trotted out by Johannes in order to demonstrate their dissimilarity to Abraham. These "aesthetic heroes" maintain silence in order to save or protect another, and they do so in such a way as to fulfill an aesthetic imperative: Their silence is not a matter of ethical accountability alone, but it aims at the realization of an aesthetic ideal.[26] Silence viewed aesthetically can intensify drama, holding the audience in suspense; can heighten irony, as when the viewer knows something vital the characters do not; and can deepen the observer's admiration for a character who faces her fate with heroic determination.

Sometimes, Johannes writes – and these are interesting cases – both the aesthetic and the ethical ideal demand disclosure. We know why the ethical does, because responsibility to others requires that we give an account of ourselves, our intentions, and our justifications for our actions. The aesthetic sometimes does as well, again because the dramatic force, the quality of a story as a story, is enhanced. Here we see how the life of faith and the language that describes such a life reappropriate aesthetic integrity on the far side of the suspension of the ethical. I intend to show in this section how words of faith to one who judges externally will indicate a potential error and how those same words to one who hears with the ears of the inner person will stretch themselves to address both a chastened

but the usual suggestion is that Johannes, in practicing dialectical lyric, is putting together philosophical, argumentative discourse, with poetic, evocative imagery; what I am suggesting is that he is aiming for a form of expression appropriate to a truth that is fully available neither to dialectic nor to lyric alone, such that he is not so much conjoining two modes as he is developing a mode that would underpin both philosophy and poetry.

[26] I have discussed these characters and how they realize to differing extents the achievement of ethical and aesthetic ideals in Hanson (2011).

ethical demand and a reassertion of an equally fragmented aesthetic requirement. In faith the ethical and aesthetic are both overcome but also transformed in such a way as to put redoubled pressure on the person of faith and her way of speaking. In the case of successful speech about faith, a case that I would say typifies what Kierkegaard means by *communication*, the good and the beautiful reunite in a way that will be open to question by the suspicious but is life-giving to the inner person. Abraham's words then do a kind of warped justice to both the need to be truthful (Silentio thus says he speaks in a way that is evasive but not, strictly speaking, false) and the need to be beautiful (such that Silentio can say that without these words something aesthetically satisfying would be missing from Abraham's story). If these are the parameters within which Johannes is working, what they imply is that he judges Abraham's final utterance to be the only one that does justice to the ordeal in which Abraham finds himself *and* to the faith that is guiding him through it. This is why Johannes claims that Abraham's "total presence"[27] is discernible in this word: This is, as it were, the message of his life, the consummation of his character.

This is clearly seen by way of comparison to the case of Agamemnon from *Iphigenia in Aulis*: "Esthetics now requires silence of Agamemnon, inasmuch as it would be unworthy of the hero to seek consolation from any other person, just as out of solicitude for the women he ought to conceal it from them as long as possible."[28] So at first it would seem that Agamemnon is both aesthetically and ethically justified in maintaining his silence; for his heroism to be what it is he must keep the terror to himself without seeking comfort from another and prevent the relevant parties to his intended deed from finding out what he has in store, to protect them as it were for as long as he can. And yet,

> At the same time, the hero, precisely in order to be a hero, must also be tried in the frightful temptation which the tears of Clytemnestra and Iphigenia will cause him. What does esthetics do? It has a way out; it has an old servant in readiness who discloses everything to Clytemnestra. Now everything is in order.[29]

Ethically now Agamemnon has to face up to his responsibility to tell his wife and daughter what he has planned – "the tragic hero demonstrates his ethical courage precisely by announcing Iphigenia's fate to her himself"[30] – but this outcome also meets an aesthetic demand that the drama be as

[27] FT 104/SKS 4, 206. [28] FT 76/SKS 4, 176. [29] FT 76/SKS 4, 176–77.
[30] FT 76/SKS 4, 177.

wrenching as possible – "In the play Iphigenia receives permission to weep . . . and to use all her art, 'which only is tears,' and to entwine herself, instead of an olive branch, around his knees."[31] Now, as Johannes would say, everything is in order.

This interpretation immediately precedes the many vignettes that Johannes goes on to examine in *Problema* III – the Delphic bridegroom, Tobias and Sarah, Agnes and the merman, and many more besides – all of which I think can be read as interplays of the ethical and aesthetic in a variety of possible collisions and ricochets. Once Johannes has finished with these vignettes however, he returns to Abraham, and I think it is useful to read Abraham against Agamemnon once again, here in *Problema* III, just as Johannes had his reader do in *Problemata* I and II.[32] The primary point of disanalogy between Agamemnon and Abraham is that the former can speak but does not, while the latter "*cannot* speak."[33] Now it should be abundantly clear that by this Johannes does not mean Abraham is physically incapable of issuing forth language;[34] the dilemma is that he cannot in speaking make himself *understood*:

> For if I cannot make myself intelligible when I speak, I do not speak even though I go on talking incessantly day and night. This is Abraham's situation . . . Now Abraham can say the most beautiful words any language can procure about how he loves Isaac. But this is not what at heart he has in mind to say, it is something deeper, that he is willing to sacrifice Isaac because it is a trial.[35]

Now Johannes the playwright, the dramatist, the imitator of Euripides, imposes upon Abraham's silence.

This imposition may be one of the more substantive innovations of *Problema* III. It is true that throughout the text Johannes has emphasized Abraham's alienation from communication and community, but we should be careful here. It is very strange that commentators on *Fear and Trembling* continue to write as if the ethical as universal were the unquestioned realm of community. I remarked above that John Lippitt has given us good reasons for thinking that the identification of the features of the ethical as universal that open each of the three problemata are to be taken not as straightforward assertions of what Johannes takes it to be unquestionably true of the ethical as universal but rather as postulates that he is

[31] *Ibid*. [32] FT 50–53 and 69/SKS 4, 151–53, 169–70. [33] FT 100/SKS 4, 201.
[34] Sometimes Mulhall seems surprisingly literalistic about this; he writes as if Johannes has asserted Abraham's incapacity for vocalization, but this he has never done.
[35] FT 100/SKS 4, 201.

presenting in order to then open up for questioning.[36] If that is so, then the usually unquestioned identification of the ethical as universal with the space of public intelligibility and thus *all* community and mutual responsibility is rather more precarious. The ethical as universal may be the space of a sort of public rationality and responsibility, but this space would be a delimited one according to Johannes perhaps but certainly according to Kierkegaard. In fact Johannes' shortcomings as a guide to faith are rarely more conspicuous than when it comes to the issue of community. His claim for instance that "The one knight of faith cannot help the other at all"[37] seems dubious and exaggerated, and it is difficult to reconcile with his own assertion a few pages later "that insofar as another individual is to go the same way he must become the single individual in exactly the same way and does not need anyone's guidance."[38]

The ethical as universal is at best in my view the contested realm of *political* transparency, a site where the only possible "community" would be an unhappy one, namely, that of the collectively resigned. This point is clarified once again by comparison to the situation of Agamemnon and Iphigenia. Speaking of the possibility that the daughter would come to comprehend the father's intentions, Johannes writes, "Iphigenia yields to her father's resolve, she herself makes the infinite movement of resignation, and they now have a mutual understanding."[39] But surely this mutual understanding is only the false companionship of two persons in simultaneous despair, not in shared harmony.[40]

In my view the realm of the religious is for Kierkegaard the only site of genuine community and communication, in the religious and conventional sense of that word. The religious then is the place where we might expect communication to take place on the other side of the shipwreck of the aesthetic and the ethical. If Abraham is compelled to speak by Johannes, it is then because, like Agamemnon, he is now under the renewed pressure of both ethical and aesthetic concerns, which reassert themselves in new cooperation within the life of faith, where genuine community and communication are made possible. "This last word of Abraham I shall consider here in a little more detail," writes Johannes.

[36] Lippitt (2003), pp. 81–82. See also footnote 14 above. [37] FT 62/SKS 4, 163.
[38] FT 70/SKS 4, 171. [39] FT 101–02/SKS 4, 203.
[40] As Dan Conway has noted in private correspondence with the author, the emphasis of the biblical narrator is on Abraham and Isaac's journeying "together" *after* Isaac has heard his father's expression of trust in God, and presumably, Isaac's having understood this expression in some way. I take it this is further evidence for the possibility of a new community forged in faith, though this possibility may be one that eludes Johannes' full appreciation.

"Without this word the whole incident would lack something; if it had been different, then everything would perhaps dissolve into confusion."[41] I submit that the "something" that would have been lacking in the incident is an *aesthetic something*, a quality that if it were missing would diminish the artistry and the perfection of the narrative qua narrative. Abraham's story is after all *a story*, and as such it recovers something of the ideals that faith transforms in their overcoming: As a story it must be ethically demanding and aesthetically satisfying in order to speak to the inner person and past the bifurcation between literal and figurative.

Johannes says he has often wondered to himself whether a tragic hero should have a "last word" to say, and he says further he has decided it comes down to what sphere of life such a hero belongs to, whether or not his deed is oriented to spirit. That a tragic hero can say "a few appropriate words" is not in question, only "whether it is appropriate for him to say them."[42] Again, notice the emphasis on the language of aesthetic fittingness. Later on the same page, again by way of contrast to Agamemnon, Johannes contends that a tragic hero like the Greek king, whose deed is not oriented to spirit, would undercut the integrity of his consummating act, the sacrifice of his daughter, if he were to speak about it before, during, or after, actually doing it himself. Johannes explains, "the etiquette of tragedy enjoins him to accomplish his task silently."[43] Once more, it is an aesthetic imperative that enters into this prefatory consideration of Abraham's last words: Are they appropriate? Do they fulfill the etiquette that the circumstance demands be observed?

Closer to Abraham's situation is Socrates, since he is an intellectual hero whose deed is oriented to spirit, unlike Agamemnon's. Hence the circumstance of his death calls for commentary. Were Socrates simply to die silently, his companions could lose confidence in his fidelity to the methods and passions of his life, which were inseparable from the art of conversation. Socrates then must *say something* upon the occasion of his death in order to vindicate for the last time the manner in which he spent his life. Now, according to Johannes, while all this may be valid, nevertheless,

> What is briefly suggested here is certainly not applicable to Abraham if one thinks by some analogy to be able to find an appropriate final word for Abraham. But it certainly does apply provided one perceives the necessity of Abraham having to fulfill himself at the final moment, not by silently drawing the knife but by having a word to say, since as the father of faith

[41] FT 102/SKS 4, 203. [42] *Ibid.* [43] FT 102/SKS 4, 204.

> he has absolute significance with respect to spirit. As to what he is to say, I can form no conception in advance; after he has said it, I presumably can understand it, presumably in a certain sense can understand Abraham in what was said, yet without thereby coming any closer to him than I have previously.[44]

Note carefully the essential claim here that Johannes is making: What we can be sure of based on an analogy to Socrates and others like him is *that* Abraham must have *something* to say, but *what* that *something* is we cannot predict. Once that something has been said, then in that something we have the best opportunity we will get to understand Abraham, not that he can be understood in any conventional sense, as Johannes has consistently denied, but that if he is to be understood in any way, this is that way, through the retrospective grasp of what he said, the content of which was in no way predictable, though the occasion demanded it. What *motivates* the utterance of Abraham's words of faith is both an ethical demand and an aesthetic expectation; *that* he must speak is an eventuality that is not utterly unpredictable given the argument so far, though *what* he will speak is utterly unpredictable. The scene has been set for this final act, inasmuch as the ethical and aesthetic collide in this moment: Abraham speaks because he is ethically required to do so and because the conventions of dramatic narrative dictate it.

So Abraham is bound to speak, though we do not know how he will, and once he does, he tags the ethical and aesthetic bases in one accomplished double play: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." This utterance fulfills – admittedly elusively – the ethical demand that Abraham not lie about what he is convinced of. "Now if Abraham had replied, 'I know nothing,' he would have uttered an untruth. He cannot say anything, for what he knows he cannot say."[45] Ethically, if he were going to tell Isaac what he intended, as Agamemnon told Iphigenia so they could share a "mutual understanding,"[46] "then he ought to have spoken long before"[47] as Johannes points out. Abraham's words also express an aesthetically satisfying quality as well, whether we are content to call them "irony" as Johannes does or by some other name, the point is that they have a beauty and fittingness that is appropriate to the situation. Abraham's final word is elegant, economical, elusive, and forecasts the happy ending for which every reader longs. Faith thus has to unite the ethical and aesthetic after both have been individually surpassed on

[44] FT 103–04/SKS 4, 205. [45] FT 105/SKS 4, 206. [46] FT 102/SKS 4, 203.
[47] FT 104/SKS 4, 206.

the itinerary of the faithful person's journey. As a result, words of faith will evince an odd fidelity to both a chastened ethical requirement to speak truthfully and a fragmented aesthetic demand to speak beautifully.

"I will love you always"

We can read Abraham's final utterance then not merely in a literal or in a merely figurative fashion, and having done so I think also indicates how we must allow this mode of interpretation to rest, if uneasily, with a certain kind of "error." I would like to draw an analogy to another form of expression that we routinely treat in neither a straightforwardly literal manner nor as if it were simply a metaphor. Taking as an inspiration Johannes' last remark about Abraham's greatness – that it consisted in his having "remained true to his love"[48] – we might consider the possibility of comparing his words of faith with another sort of utterance: a proclamation of love. If a lover promises his beloved "I will love you always," then this declaration has to be evaluated in a way that is neither literal nor figurative. Its value is not subject to assessment in either mode. If the beloved held the lover to such a promise in strictly literal terms, then any lover would fail by that standard, because no one can *always* live up to it. At any given moment in that shared life, a lover may in fact not be particularly loving; certainly at various moments he will not *feel* very loving. Conversely, a beloved would be well within her rights to take it that her lover is not speaking figuratively when he says, "I will love you always." The lover stakes himself in the words of his pledge. He may know he cannot exactly fulfill the words of his own promise even as he makes it, but he cannot possibly qualify his promise with a mental or verbal reservation along the lines of "As far as I know, I will love you always."[49] This restriction prevents his words from being merely metaphorical.

Declaring "I will love you always" does not assume that this promise will be fulfilled in the same way; the *how* of its fulfillment remains open to future reinvention and imaginative re-construal. It does not assume that we grasp at the time of proclamation the full consequence of the promise.

[48] FT 106/SKS 4, 207.

[49] Richard Moran makes the point that there is a normative expectation that simply goes along with first-person testimony: "we also expect and sometimes insist that he take himself to be in a position to *speak for* his feelings and convictions, and not simply to offer his best opinion about them ('Do you intend to pay the money back?' 'As far as I can tell, yes.')." Clearly this would not be a suitable form of proclamation, and we cannot read Abraham's utterance as if it were akin to this. Moran (2001), p. 26. This helpful quote appears in Rudd (2012), p. 14.

What it *means* to have pledged ourselves in such a way cannot be clear at first; only living into the promise over the course of time and practicing its fulfillment (possibly even failing at fulfilling it, even repeatedly) can reveal what it meant in the first place. Finally, such a proclamation of love does not even require strict correctness every single moment of every single day. The test cannot consist in a series of occasional verifications, as if the beloved could determine whether it was true her lover really loved her by "checking up" every day on the quality of his behavior to make sure it met her expectations. The quality of such a proclamation does not conclusively rely on any definite outcome, as if love could be utterly vitiated by an undesirable state of affairs or completely vindicated by a set of fortuitous developments. The quality of a proclamation of love instead expresses a stance that has been taken up by the lover in the face of *any* outcome, for good or ill. Indeed, such resolve in the face of any eventuality is what makes a promise what it is.

The "test" of its validity is proven in the complex repetitions of its performance, not in its susceptibility to verification or falsification. We could imagine a churlish beloved objecting to her lover's promise on the grounds that during the course of the week she felt unloved every day between breakfast and lunch. Or a pedantic and patronizing beloved smugly accrediting his lover with success on the grounds that she was slavishly attentive to his every need. Both of these "standards" would suit only the one judging externally, the one relying on her own unregenerate notions of what love must look like in order to "count" as it were. And both would fail to discern that the proof of love is not fully deducible from a series of specific acts that do or do not suit her preferences. The inner person holds her lover to his promise with the recognition that how his love will be shown may differ from how she wants to be shown love and will be prepared to forgive his failures, an act that does not excuse him from his promise but in fact holds him to it all the more insistently.

The one who promises love, like Abraham, speaks "in a divine language," he speaks "in tongues"[50] or "in a foreign tongue."[51] And this I submit is what anyone who wishes to speak about faith must do. To speak out a truth that is neither literal nor figurative is to adopt a whole new mode of speech, a mode of expression that reaffirms confidences and trusts – "The Lord will provide" – while conceding that even the speaker herself has no idea *how* the Lord will provide. Abraham's utterance is both in form and in content the paradigmatic speech about faith. Faith trusts God will provide while remaining open to the unexpected ways in which

[50] FT 101/SKS 4, 202. [51] FT 105/SKS 4, 206.

that provision will express itself: This is both *what* Abraham says and *how* he says it. His wisdom speaks *truly* and *beautifully* about a reality that the speaker cannot claim to possess but by which he is possessed. The one who speaks of faith in an important sense does not know what she is talking about, but her words give voice to a meaning that recedes from her grasp and from the grasp of every traditional scientific (in the broad sense) discourse.

It is for this reason I would then finally say that Abraham's utterance may also be capable of sufficient "elasticity of irony"[52] to co-exist with a species of "factual error." As I have already said, it is probably not wise to put too much stock in the "ram" and "lamb" problem, but I do believe that there is a potentially deliberate latitude of error that is being accommodated by Johannes' treatment of this last point. Even leaving aside the "ram"/"lamb" distinction, surely there is something to be said about the fact that, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" turns out not to pinpoint any outcome with precision. Proximately the sacrifice is a ram; remotely the sacrifice is Jesus the Christ, the descendant of Isaac. I think rather than prefer a literal or allegorical reading (and thus in either event one that would be in a sense "erroneous"), it is best to affirm both. Both the ram and the Lamb of God can be what the Lord will provide, because the truth of the Lord's provision is one that I have to accept on the condition that I do not know in advance how its truth will be fulfilled.[53] To one who judges externally, such variations and alterations in the reciprocal interplay of promise and fulfillment can be easily judged "errors" or failures. The one who has faith will view matters more flexibly – or even charitably.

In a dazzling fashion, Abraham's speech turns out to be a true one in every sense. That the Lord will provide means that there is both a substitute for Isaac and ultimately a substitute for us all. So it is in fact important that there is an apparent divergence between literal truth and figurative truth when it comes to speech about faith. The distinction between "ram" and "lamb" is probably not a crucial one, but the general prospect of divergence between literal and figurative is. But this divergence does not lead to the conclusion that Abraham is factually incorrect but to

[52] FT 103/SKS 4, 204.

[53] I have to thank George Pattison for pointing out a feature of this distinction that actually strengthens my case, namely, that a "ram," as a mature representative of the species, could be interpreted as a *greater* provision than a mere "lamb," which would be valued less highly. While the exact character of God's provision could not have been anticipated in advance, the reward is that it exceeds rather than merely meets Abraham's expectation. This could be one way in which to judge the outcome of Abraham's prophecy as a genuine fulfillment of that prophecy rather than a case of wish-fulfillment or confirmation bias.

the more interesting conclusion that he is both literally and figuratively correct, where his correctness is apparent only when his expectations about what correctness would consist in have been adjusted.[54] In the same way, a faithful lover could look back on a lifetime of devotion and say that through thick and thin, in sickness and in health, for richer and poorer, in times of joy and times of sorrow – despite perhaps even many failures – that he did remain true to his love.

Abraham, like Socrates, preserves something of this "elasticity of irony." His confidence is that the Lord will provide even when it seems like this cannot be true, or even that there is no way to test whether it is true, or even when it seems like divine provision is nothing other than what human understanding would deem a deprivation instead. Indeed, the meaning of Abraham's life is that the Lord will provide, but how he has provided – through the departure from Ur, through the miraculous pregnancy of Sarah, through the renunciation and gifting back of Isaac – has been ever a surprise and ever will be. That the Lord will provide is in a sense not literally true: What divine provision will look like always fails to meet our expectations or deviates from the norm or defies customary ways of understanding. But that the Lord will provide is not a metaphor either. The person who judges outwardly will designate one sort of outcome as the result of providence, while another she will judge as bad luck or fate. For her the truth is itself a metaphor, as flexible as her own preferences, as applicable as her own whims. For the person of faith, the goodness and beauty of life are fragile gifts. For the knight of faith, everything is God's provision, or perhaps we could say "pro-vision" to highlight the name that Abraham gives to Moriah, the mountain that becomes for him Jehovah-jireh, the place where the LORD saw, or better yet, saw to it, or as we say in Latin, *pro-videre*, to see ahead, to look out for. Or to use the more traditional theological term that is etymologically linked to "provision," for the inner person, *it's all providence*. That the Lord will provide is the *content* of Abraham's life and faith; what that means not even Abraham really knows. But he must give voice to it, to this truth that exceeds articulation, and once he does, he passes the test of Moriah. Just as Socrates really dies before he dies, with his final, consummating speech,[55] so I would argue is Abraham born again as the father of Isaac with these words – long before he raises the knife.

[54] I owe this insight to Michael R. Kelly. [55] FT 103/SKS 4, 204–05.

CHAPTER 13

Why Moriah?: weaning and the trauma of transcendence in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling

Vanessa Rumble

The image precedes him. For those who have read the writings of the Danish thinker, and for many who have not, the name "Kierkegaard" summons with it the image of a bearded patriarch, knife flashing, hovering above the bound body of his son. However much one would avert one's eyes from the tableau which Kierkegaard unreservedly sets at the gateway to the authorship,[1] however much one might wish to dwell on other aspects of his work – his thinking on temporality and anxiety, or his vivid evocation of the abundance of a life lived in trusting immersion in finitude – the image returns. Caravaggio's *The Sacrifice of Isaac* comes closest: there we see an aging but by no means feeble Abraham, gripping Isaac's head with one frank, muscular hand, pressing the knife close to the neck with the other. There is no mistaking the sense that, in the opening passages of *Fear and Trembling*,[2] more precisely in Johannes de Silentio's versions of the *Akedah*, something unbearable, or well nigh so, approaches. If this is a book about faith and trust,[3] it is also a book about their failure, about the possibility of their (unspeakable) collapse. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the entirety of Kierkegaard's writings remains suspended, like the raised knife, at this juncture. True to his own established practice, we will approach this intersection in terms philosophical, biographical, psychological, and literary. I wish to clear a path so my reader may approach the specter of a suffering which far exceeds the loss of any Regine, a suffering, may we call it trauma, which left Kierkegaard, like his

[1] The completed manuscript of *Either/Or* was delivered to the printer's in November of 1842. *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* appeared in print simultaneously, in October 1843.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Fear and Trembling* are from KW 6, Hongs translation.

[3] The Danish "*tro*," like the English "faith," carries the connotation of loyalty and constancy, a connotation grounded in the distinct etymologies of each. The associated senses of trust/opinion/conviction/(religious) belief are common to both. See *Ordbog over the Danske Sprog 1700–1955* (Dictionary of the Danish Language) at www.ordnet.dk.

Antigone,[4] virtually without friends, without children, with only the breath-taking beauty of a language which could never adequately name his secret.

First, philosophy: *Problemata* I, II, and III

The specter of irrational fideism which is raised by Kierkegaard's treatment of Genesis 22 has scandalized readers of the Danish philosopher for generations. The surest sign of this scandal is the amount of scholarly ink that has been dedicated to the effort of clarifying the meaning of *Fear and Trembling* – dedicated, more pointedly, to banishing any suggestion that the so-called teleological suspension of the ethical might entail an outright suspension of ethics. Alastair Hannay captures in laconic fashion the danger posed: "Most readers of *Fear and Trembling* would say that its theme is Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, that the gist of its argument is to suggest that Abraham can only be justified if morality as we ordinarily understand it can be suspended by an overriding authority whose edicts demand blind obedience."[5] In response to such a reading, Kierkegaard's apologists swing into action. The title of Ronald Green's rejoinder, "Enough is Enough! *Fear and Trembling* is *Not* about Ethics," captures the vehemence with which de Silentio's purported voluntarism is contested.[6] In addition, de Silentio himself discounts the suggestion that ethics can be set aside at the behest of an inscrutable deity. *Problemata* I and II make a sustained case that a sacrifice made in the name of "an Absolute Duty to the Absolute" can be known and can be shown to be distinct from murder. The unsettling, staccato accounts of Abraham and Isaac's journey up Moriah and the subsequent either/or posed – murder or sacrifice – give way to a reassuringly Latinate elaboration of a putative

[4] In *Either/Or*'s "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama," "A" describes a "modern" Antigone whose life, unlike her ancient counterpart, is wholly devoted to her "grief," her father's (Oedipus') secret: "Her secret sinks deeper and deeper into her soul, ever more inaccessible to any living being. . . Antigone [is] a bride—indeed she is almost more, she is a mother. Purely esthetically, she is *virgo mater*; she carries her secret under her heart, concealed and hidden" (KW 2, 157–58/SKS 2, 156). In Kierkegaard's case, the secret seems less the father's legendary lapses – the cursing of God on the Jutland heath or his sexual relationship with Kierkegaard's mother before the customary period of mourning for his first spouse had elapsed – than the father's insistent projection of his guilt onto his beloved son, whether through misguided religious pedagogy, exaggerated and invasive interest in his son's physical development, or the remarkable proclamation of the divine punishment awaited by Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, the price for his sins – that none of his seven children would live beyond the age of thirty-four – an expectation which the elder Kierkegaard made dramatically clear to his surviving sons.

[5] Hannay (2001), p. 189.

[6] Green's argument is that de Silentio advances the "classical Pauline-Lutheran doctrine of justification through faith alone." Green (1993).

teleological suspension of the ethical, and the upshot is this: the ethical can be suspended, *for* a higher aim, *when* an individual's ethical obligation has been fulfilled. Then and only then does faith come into play. The reader is assured that the suspension of the ethical becomes possible first when an individual's ethical obligations have been fulfilled. And the ethical demand in Abraham's case is plain: the duty of a father is to love his son – to tend to his well-being. Religious sacrifice, then, is not the prerogative of blood-thirsty primal fathers. Though he cannot mitigate the isolation borne by knights of faith, de Silentio's schema offers refuge from the dizzying anxiety at the heights of Moriah. Would-be knights of faith could mount Moriah, with their checklists in hand, knowing themselves justified in surpassing the ethical once they have fulfilled it, and, though understood by none, they would remain confident in their "legitimacy." The prior fulfillment of the ethical is the condition of the religious. Before approaching the makeshift altar on Moriah, one must be sure one has loved as one should.

This refuge is a fleeting one, however, for de Silentio concedes in a footnote to *Problema* III that humans have forfeited the *sine qua non* for fulfilling the ethical.[7] We cannot, as Paul says, do the good we will. This concession – that no human "analogy" to Abraham and his incomparable righteousness exists, that we do not possess (and Luther nods solemnly in agreement) the requisite self-knowledge to determine whether we love others as we should – this concession demolishes the scaffolding which was to guarantee the distinction between crime and religious sacrifice, murder and faith. At this point the reader recalls the title of the book before her and recalls, too, that the fear and trembling which destabilizes all finite ethical markers and overturns any humanly grounded sense of justification would likely not be banished by a few pages of de Silentio's dialectical legerdemain. So we return, humbled, to the Attunement of *Fear and Trembling*, in search of that to which we as readers are to become attuned.[8]

[7] "In sin the individual is already in terms of the demonic paradox higher than the universal, because it is a contradiction on the part of the universal to want to impose itself on someone who lacks the *conditio sine qua non*." Could the history of Kierkegaard scholarship be read as the refusal to take this quote seriously? Variations appear in both pseudonymous and acknowledged works. See Kierkegaard (1985), p. 124.

[8] The section of the text to which I wish to draw attention bears the heading "*Stemning*" in Danish, which is translated as "Exordium" by the Hongs, "Attunement" by Hannay, and "Tuning Up" by Sylvia Walsh. "*Stemning*" refers primarily to mood or atmosphere and carries associations to voice and pitch, as is the case with the German "*Stimmung*" (FT 10/SKS 4, 105).

In the two *problemata*, as we have seen, de Silentio sets forth the possibility of a justified teleological suspension of the ethical. Though the concept is meaningful in theoretical terms; for example, as a protest against Hegel's understanding of the ethical as *Sittlichkeit*,[9] it is not a category to which any existing individual legitimately could lay claim as a justification for action. In this sense, *Problemata* I and II comprise a determined if futile flight from the eye of Abraham's trial. In view of the unworkable distinctions of *Problemata* I and II, the Attunement reasserts its significance.

Numerous commentators, including Alastair Hannay, have made a good case that *Fear and Trembling* does not promote and was not intended to promote the sort of blind obedience to authority to which he referred in the passage quoted above. But rather than re-posing the question of which philosophical position on the gradated scale "rationalist–irrationalist" may best be assigned to de Silentio, I wish to probe more deeply into the way in which the unforgettable depiction of sacrifice, this moment of simultaneous submission and will-to-violation, functions in the text. In order to do so, I advance a basic point of interpretation, one which is well within the bounds of both Christian orthodoxy and standard readings of the text. The point is to (1) suggest that the story of the binding of Isaac exceeds and even challenges the more overt themes of the text and in so doing (2) alert the reader to lines of thought or experience which the "argument," taken in isolation, conceals.

Let us assume, then, that a central "confession" of *Fear and Trembling* is that which Augustine in Book IX of his *Confessions* attributes to the whole of creation, the proclamation of our ultimate dependence and incompleteness. "[Let] every tongue and every sign and all that is transient . . . [grow] silent—for all these things have the same message to tell, if only we can hear it, and their message is this: We did not make ourselves."[10] *Fear and Trembling* can be said to utter the same – that we did not make ourselves and we do not know ourselves. Given the drive for autonomy, control, and exclusion of otherness which Kierkegaard designates "sin" – and these drives are, it would seem, always the "given" – the journey to this recognition is one fraught with sacrifice – it is the journey up Moriah, it

[9] The notion of a teleological suspension of the ethical contradicts Hegel's assertion, in the *Philosophy of Right*, that obligation is to be construed as hierarchically based on the relation to ever more inclusive social wholes.

[10] St. Augustine (1961), p. 198.

is the way of the cross. The news of our fundamental limitations and the offense these limits spawn is the killing/saving grace that both Abraham and his cheerful counterpart, the bourgeois knight of faith, must embrace. In other words, *Fear and Trembling* is principally concerned with the embrace of finitude [*Endelighed*] rather than fanatical fideism. Let us assume it to be so.

When we make this assumption, something remarkable comes to the fore. In the rush to explain away some of the more radical construals of de Silentio's reformulations of Genesis 22, a different question has been obscured: why, if Kierkegaard's aim is to guide us in the direction of embracing finitude, did he choose to write on the binding of Isaac? If the "moral" of the story, or one of them, is that we misunderstand life and ourselves, and perhaps more, when we strive for autonomy, could not this lesson have been presented in innumerable ways which do *not* pose the offense and the possibility of misunderstanding so palpably present in *Fear and Trembling*? Through many years of teaching this text, I have come to recognize, if only belatedly, that the vivid portrait of the near slaughter of children can be profoundly unsettling. Granted Kierkegaard had no intention of making the journey to Christianity an easy one; nonetheless, we might ask whether the scenarios depicted in the Attunement could *possibly* promote the embrace of what we have posited as a central message of the text – that we are dependent beings, implicated at the core in the being of others. Acknowledging these ties, admitting the illusory nature of our autonomy, can hardly be aided by intimations of our dependence on a transcendent God issuing incomprehensible edicts to his boundary-violating follower. Yet this is the story with which we are presented, one divorced from its presumed historic setting, from centuries of midrashic working-through and subsequent Christian theological scaffolding. The omission can hardly be accidental. What is afoot in *Fear and Trembling*, in its strangely unanchored fantasies and evocations of atrocity?

To anticipate, Kierkegaard's variations on the binding of Isaac are overdetermined, and understanding their function in the text presupposes receptivity to the suffering so powerfully figured therein. *Fear and Trembling* is a text that portrays a divine transcendence so extreme as to render – and perhaps this is the point – mediation, or, in theological terms, incarnation, unimaginable. The implications of this transcendence is depicted variously throughout the authorship, but *Sickness unto Death*, published seventeen years later, illustrates this rupture as the sundering of human and divine language: the repeated refrain of the text's preface is "humanly

speaking x, Christianly speaking y," and there is no suggestion that the rupture will be healed.[11] What is this but despair?

The tableau of the *Akedah*, verging as it does on the unsustainable, serves to communicate in some fashion what might otherwise remain beyond the possibility of representation. De Silentio's four improvised variations of the events on Moriah signal the extraordinary suffering to which the text serves as a witness, a suffering which, though sublimely singular, is also universal. More of this later. For now we may say that Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, like Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, is a tale told in the order of urgency. The text is about birth, weaning, sacrifice, and an extraordinary loyalty which may be called faith; it is about intimate ties to others and the sudden, potentially traumatic, severing of these ties, about binding and unbinding.

Before returning to Moriah, however, it should be noted that *Fear and Trembling* offers a glimpse of three Abraham's: the lonely figure on Moriah depicted in the Attunement, the Abraham of de Silentio's *Lovtale*[12] and the merman of *Problema* III. Bracketing the speculative musings of *Problemata* I and II, the Abraham of the Eulogy and the merman emerge as alter egos, both poetic fantasies of de Silentio.[13] The Abraham of the *Lovtale* is the Father of Faith, but no less a poetic creation for all that; it is he who is depicted in the poet's fond fancy as capable of the sublime affirmation of the finite in the face of objective uncertainty (or outright absurdity). The merman, by contrast, is easily comprehended – the seemingly peripheral figure whose paralysis and despair render him the shadowy double of the celebrated Abraham.

De Silentio's claim that sinners are always already outside the universal, incapable of fulfilling its demands, aptly describes the merman's plight, who, like all of us, is too tangled up in misunderstood self-love to love (i.e., he is in some sense a seducer) and yet too loving to be content with this

[11] See Rumble (2007).

[12] De Silentio's *Lovtale* is translated as "Eulogy" by the Hongs, "Speech in praise" by Hannay, and "Tribute" by Walsh.

[13] The possibility is made explicit in the context of Johannes Climacus' consideration of the humor as a potential incognito for the religious standpoint in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Here, Climacus calls de Silentio's depiction of the knight of faith a "rash antipation." How, he wonders, could "an observer ... become at all *aware* of him in such a way that he could place himself, admiring, outside, and wonder that there is nothing, nothing whatever, to *notice*, unless Johannes de Silentio would say that the knight of faith is his own poetic production" (CUP 500/SKS 7, 453). Climacus' suggestion is a reminder that de Silentio's treatment of the knight of faith may well exhibit the same idealizing tendencies as Constantin's fascination with the young man, and the young man with the girl, and the same underlying despair and paralysis. It is for this reason that the figures of the "young," desiring Abraham and the merman are not two arbitrary presentations, but joined at the core, with faith a projection of despair.

situation. Mired in this state, which his turbulent encounter with Agnes only confirms, the merman isolates himself at the bottom of the ocean, fearful of a contact with others that would only make his predicament plain. Alternately pitiable and laughable, the merman is unperturbed by inscrutable divine imperatives. He is, we are told, a sea creature, not suited to the sublime, heroic space of the mountain. Nonetheless, there are similarities in the sacrifice to which these men are called. Both Abraham and the merman must sacrifice what is dearest to them: they must surrender all claims to godlike completeness, they must sacrifice an all-too-worldly prudence and ambition. Abraham is called to offer up Isaac, the son who had been promised to him as the guarantor of his immortal presence on this earth. The merman must surrender his Agnete, or, more precisely, he must accept her loss as the result of his self-enclosed "nature" – there is perhaps no sacrifice here. More to the point, he must come to terms, *if* he is to regain his desire and his hope, with his perhaps quite well-founded sense that he was, from the beginning, botched, compromised, fated, somehow, to be a merman. The merman, and a host of other characters who surface magically in *Problema* III, illustrate that being healed and being helped involve the sacrifice of a deeply held belief in autonomy and the acceptance of a radically compromised will and reason. So, in this respect, both figures face the challenge of giving up what they hold dear. Nonetheless, Abraham's predicament in *Problema* I involves God's demand that he kill his son, a son who is more than a symbol of Abraham's immortality, but a being who exists in his own right.

In encountering the divine demand that he sacrifice Isaac, Abraham may be understood as challenged to reaffirm his creatureliness – to acknowledge the transcendent source of his enjoyment. Even the bourgeois knight of faith performs, in his happy-go-lucky way, a sacrifice; he buys, de Silentio tells us, "the opportune time at the highest price." That is to say, he buys his ability to live in time, without anxiety, he buys the ability to savor the abundance of life and "let things take care of themselves," by a sacrifice of his own, far less conspicuous than Abraham's, but no less real. He buys it at the price of his worldly calculation.[14] To this extent, the Attunement need not then contravene our earlier assumption as to the text's core commitments. But de Silentio's variations on the *Akedah* bear

[14] Worldly calculation is what remains of Hegelian reason (*Vernunft*) in *Fear and Trembling*. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, reason is carefully distinguished from the workaday understanding (*Verstand*). Both terms exist in Danish, but, in Kierkegaard's Lutheran lens, reason has devolved into understanding (and *Fornuft* to *Forstand*).

within them a sort of disturbing excess, one which threatens to reverse the very lesson of finitude and mutual dependence, suggesting in their place a sacrifice to end all sacrifice, the violent renunciation of vulnerability.

Reading the Exordium

The "Attunement" of *Fear and Trembling* contains the text's most familiar passages. Four separate versions of the *Akedah* are introduced, none of which correspond to Genesis 22. Prior to the first of these variations, we are introduced to a man who is obsessed with Abraham. His story opens like a fairy tale: "once upon a time there was a man [*Der var engang en Mand*]," a man who as a child had heard the story of Abraham. This man, de Silentio continues, came to admire the story of Abraham more and more as he grew older, for "*Livet havde adskilt, hvad der var forenet I Barnets fromme Eenfoldighed* [for life had divided what earlier was united in the child's pious simplicity/unity]." The man becomes more and more enthusiastic, *begejstret*, for the tale of Abraham, to the point where the story becomes the only story in his mind, and he becomes occupied, exclusively, with repeating and rehearsing in his mind the journey up Moriah, with a single desire – to witness the event [*at vidne til hiin Begivenhed*]. What he wants to witness as he accompanies Abraham, we are told, is not the "beautiful tapestry of the imagination," but "the shudder of thought" [*Tankens Gysen*]. Like fear and trembling, "*tankens gysen*" involves, perhaps, a collapsing of the distinction between the psyche and the body (the powerful image of thought crumbling in the face of what it cannot assimilate, of the mind shuddering upon encountering its limits, shuddering, like the body of one facing death). The man's desire for such a spectacle is puzzling, unless we might suppose, provisionally, that his desire to approach the shuddering of thought is the desire to retrieve the purported unity of the child, the desire to witness or participate in something (the sacrifice, the shuddering, of thought) which might restore him to himself and free him from the prospect of loss and death.

What follows this fairy tale about a man trying to recoup through violent means a life of pious innocence are four versions of the *Akedah*, none of which correspond to the version in Genesis 22. Unlike the rendering in the Hebrew Bible, each version culminates in breach of trust or loss of faith. The first tale involves deception (Abraham purports to be a madman, an idolater, in order to preserve Isaac's faith in God) and the three versions which follow involve despair, either Abraham's (versions two and three) or Isaac's (version four). In versions two and three, Abraham

loses faith in God, for having imposed such a trial, and subsequently in himself, for having been willing to obey the divine command. In version four, it is Isaac who, catching sight of Abraham's clenched fist and reading this as a token of despair, himself falls into despair [*Fortvivlelse*].

Commentators have mentioned the possibility of reading these stories in light of the events of Kierkegaard's life. Many associate Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac with Kierkegaard's sacrifice of Regine, that is, his breaking off of the engagement to her, which occurred about a year and half prior to his writing *Fear and Trembling*. Another scholar disputes this claim and protests that the sacrifice refers not, or not primarily, to the broken engagement, but to the influence of Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard on his son. Ronald Green claims that what is presented here is Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard's premature and traumatic initiation of his son into notions of sin and familial guilt, a schooling which sowed the seeds of melancholy for years to come, rather than a hidden message to Regine.[15] In Green's version it is Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, not Søren, who holds the knife. I suggest that, if we view these passages as overdetermined in their meaning rather than based on a one-to-one correspondence between biblical characters and family members, the *Akedah* variations can be understood as referring to Kierkegaard's relation to his father and to Regine, and, more importantly, the impact of the one on the other. If de Silentio's variations on the *Akedah* are read as a series, they depict the contagious nature of despair: Isaac glimpses Abraham's clenched fist, and Isaac himself falls into despair and a profound state of isolation. For Kierkegaard, the intergenerational transmission of despair is a recurrent theme, depicted most prominently in *The Concept of Anxiety* in its treatment of original sin. A number of sketches in *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *Stages on Life's Way* treat familial secrets and their devastating effects.[16] In all these cases, the sins of the fathers are visited on sons and daughters. Dark intimations cause hope and courage to wither on the vine. The ability to embrace life and finitude as abundant, as replete with signs of hope, regeneration, and reconciliation, fades. The Abraham of the Attunement, unlike the Abraham of the Eulogy to follow, is not young, but old. "He could not forget that God had ordered him to do this." And, by the fourth variation, neither can Isaac. Trust and community are

[15] Green (1986).

[16] A noteworthy instance is the 1842 recasting of Antigone in *Either/Or* as a young woman whose family's secret was unknown to Thebes and only to herself, with dire results. In the attempt to protect her father, she becomes isolated from the world, dying in the tomb built of the severed relations of others.

sundered, and with these the promise of the future. Note here the etymology of the Danish word for despair, "*Fortvivlse*." *Tvivl*, doubt, is derived from the Old Norsk root for two, "*tvo*." The loss of faith in the other, staged vividly here in Abraham's broken faith and Isaac's betrayal (through some form of trauma) precipitates a sense of alienation from others and oneself. Dori Laub, Holocaust survivor and founder of the Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimony at Yale, writes of the loss of both the external and the internal "Thou" in the aftermath of trauma.[17]

In summary, de Silentio's four versions of the *Akedah* variations constitute a vivid enactment of the transmission, from one generation to the next, of what Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety* will call original sin. In original sin, the subject is not forced into sin (the refusal of the other), but is disposed toward it. The setting is laid for despair. With an eye to biographical considerations, we might also suppose that the period spent writing *Fear and Trembling*, roughly a year after the broken engagement with Regine Olsen, was a time in which Kierkegaard would have been absorbing the consequences, for his life, of the broken engagement. He himself was not to become a father. In addition, he fully expected, in obedience to his own father's dire pronouncements, not to live beyond the age of thirty-four.[18] This means that, at the time of *Fear and Trembling*'s publication, he had, in his own mind, four years left to live. In this context, the looming reality of hereditary guilt takes on a very concrete shape.

By now, we might feel that we have a good sense of the depth of reference contained in Kierkegaard's *Akedah* variations. But the story is still at most half-finished. Let us circle again through Kierkegaard's life and losses, how they appear in these passages, and how we in turn are implicated in these.

Omitted in our discussion up to this point are the four epigrams appended to the tales of Abraham, epigrams concerned with a mother's weaning of her child. Four times, the reader's attention is shifted abruptly from the seemingly singular event atop Moriah, with its sublime focus on the harrowing choice of an individual, to the commonplace domestic scene of nursing and weaning. One searches for correspondences. In the first version, like the first rendition of the *Akedah*, the story ends happily, thanks to a little deception: "when the child is to be weaned, the mother

[17] Laub (2013), p. 198.

[18] "How strange that I have turned thirty-four. It is utterly inconceivable to me. I was so sure that I would die before or on this birthday that I could actually be tempted to suppose that the date of my birth had been erroneously recorded and that I will still die on my thirty-fourth." Cited in Garff (2000), p. 137.

blackens her breast. It would be hard to have the breast look inviting when the child must not have it. So the child believes the breast has changed, but the mother – she is still the same, her gaze is tender and loving as ever. How fortunate the one who did not need more terrible means to wean the child."[19] Just as Abraham plays the madman to keep Isaac's faith in God intact, just as Kierkegaard played the seducer to preserve Regine's faith, here the breast is the scapegoat, the loving mother the same as always. The remaining three tales of weaning each conclude with an oblique reference to a less auspicious outcome. The second weaning story reads as follows: "When the child has grown big and is to be weaned, the mother virginally conceives her breast, and then the child no longer has a mother. How fortunate the child who has not lost its mother in some other way."[20] Again, in the third telling, "When the child is to be weaned, the mother, too, is not without sorrow, because she and the child are more and more to be separated, because the child who first lay under her heart and later rested upon her breast will never again be so close. So they grieve together the brief sorrow. How fortunate the one who kept the child so close and did not need to grieve anymore!"[21] Here, the word for separation in Danish [*skilles ad*] refers us back to the alienated state of the fictional man who was so captivated by the story of Abraham. Finally, in its fourth version, the epigram reads as follows: "when the child is to be weaned, the mother has stronger sustenance [*stærkere Føde*] at hand so that the child does not die. How fortunate the one who has this stronger sustenance at hand."[22] What is repeatedly invoked is a loss which, unlike the loss of the breast, sets up a situation of permanent mourning and incompleteness. If weaning, that is, individuation, occurs normally in the course of human development, what then is the "peril" alluded to in the final epigram? The absence of "stronger sustenance" suggests a despair which corresponds to that of Isaac in the fourth *Akedah* variation. Weaning comes to represent both a "natural" loss and a more menacing, possibly irrecuperable despair. The one involves the forfeiture of a closeness and a simplicity which cannot be recaptured, which cannot even be pictured except through the distortive lens of nostalgia. The other is represented only as an unspeakable eventuality – "lucky" the one spared it. The first is a powerful loss; it is presumably the loss suffered by the man who wants to walk with Abraham up to Moriah. It is the sea change from the illusion of unity to the incursion of language. The other?

[19] FT 11/SKS 4, 108. [20] FT 12/SKS 4, 109. [21] FT 13/SKS 4, 110. [22] FT 14/SKS 4, 111.

Kierkegaard's repeated return to sagas of weaning in the Attunement is surprising. What acquaintance did Kierkegaard have with breast-feeding in the home? As the youngest child of the brood, it would not have been a household occurrence in his early childhood years. In his own authorship, while he often writes tales involving kings and young maidens, we do not often encounter references to the physical aspects of mothering, and, in addition, and as has often been mentioned, there are no references to his own mother in published works rife with references to the father. So this close and perceptive attention to the feelings of mother and child are moving in their frankness, and in the absence of the alternating idealization and irony so often present in Kierkegaard's discussions of women. Of course, Kierkegaard had three sisters, two of whom were mothers. What do we know of them? Until I began work on this chapter, I knew only that they died prior to the age of thrity-four. Let us look again.

The losses Kierkegaard experienced, losing five of his six siblings and his mother by age twenty-one, are frequently referenced in accounts of his life. His brother Søren Michael died of a hemorrhage at age twelve after a collision in a schoolyard, his sister Maren Kirstine, the oldest child, died at age twenty-four, when Kierkegaard was nine. She passed away after a decade-long illness, "a quiet and peaceful death," in the words of her parents, though her death certificate lists the cause of death as "convulsions."[23] Sister Nicoline Kristine died in 1832, when Kierkegaard was nineteen, after the birth of a stillborn child, leaving behind children aged seven, six, five, and two. A letter from an acquaintance of the family remarks that the "midwife did not do enough to get rid of the milk which went up to her brain, so the poor woman went mad and died ten days later."[24] And 1834, Kierkegaard's twenty-first year, saw the death of his mother from typhoid, of his brother Niels Andreas from tuberculosis in Patterson, New Jersey, and lastly, of Petrea Severine from complications surrounding childbirth. Petrea Severine, Kierkegaard's favorite sister, fell ill after giving birth. She was able to nurse, but it was nonetheless feared by that midwife that "her milk would go up to her brain and make her mad."[25] She died amid violent convulsions just over two weeks after the birth, leaving behind a sixteen-day-old infant boy and his older siblings, aged one, three, and five. It would not be unreasonable to venture that, in breaking off his engagement with Regine Olsen, it was not merely the family's melancholy which he would spare her.

[23] Garff (2000), p. 39. [24] *Ibid.*, p. 46. [25] *Ibid.*

Weaning normally calls to mind the movement of individuation and dawning consciousness/self-consciousness, a passing moment of separation and mourning.[26] The infant emerges from a state which, retrospectively, will appear as one of unity, plenitude, into the difficult reality of mediating between the necessary and the possible, the real and the ideal, in short, into the reality of our freedom and its limits. In the experience of Kierkegaard and his siblings, however, weaning is tied, through the pronouncements of the midwives, to horrific loss. Milk, the infant's earliest nourishment, and the mother's first medium for communicating her love, care and attention, becomes, in the accounts which Kierkegaard heard swirling about his sisters' deathbeds, a poison which attacks the mother's brain. The milk that was to join the mother to the child and sustain the child destroys the mother, separating them brutally and definitively. And after the trauma comes the invariable question: what is all this to mean?

In both the tales of Abraham and the stories of weaning, we are confronted at eerie proximity with the prospect of an absent, incoherent, and violating deity, an image of nightmarish proportions, the fear that God's commands are madness, and God's providential care of the smallest and most vulnerable non-existent.[27] The image of a god who could sanction this loss calls to mind the conviction so heedlessly communicated by Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard to his sons – that a God might kill children in belated punishment for the crimes of another (himself). One can easily imagine that Kierkegaard sought for some intention behind the events that left eight young children in his immediate family exposed and vulnerable in the absence of their mothers' love. As Nietzsche said, nature hates a vacuum, and the prospect of meaningless suffering is the worst vacuum of all. In the scenarios so vividly invoked, the "stronger sustenance" of communication between divine and human is dislodged by the trauma of brutal, recurrent, naked loss. One emerges from cozy union with the other into a nightmare of incomprehensibility, both the infants so

[26] If we can adopt Johannes Climacus' formulation from the early fragment, *Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, written in the winter and spring of 1843, just prior to the composition of *Fear and Trembling*, consciousness is charged with the task of relating immediacy/reality [*Realitet*] to mediacy/ideality/the word [*ordet*]. As such, consciousness, Johannes Climacus writes, is a contradiction; it entails division and alienation. It serves as the intermediary between the realms of language and reality, and is ever in a state of self-redemption, which, Climacus notes, is registered in the etymology of the Danish word for doubt, *tvivl*, and the word for despair, *fortvivlesle*, which (just as the German *"zweifel"*) are based on the root "tvo," or two.

[27] In emphasizing the sublime dimension of the weanings portrayed in the Attunement, I am of necessity at odds with the rich and sensitive accounts offered by Linda Williams and Edward Mooney in their treatments of the same. Mooney (1991). Williams (1998). See also the contribution by Mooney and Lloyd in this volume.

abruptly severed from their mothers' care and the adults left to grapple with its meaning.

In the *Akedah* variations on Moriah, Kierkegaard, in the effort to marshal all this suffering, turns passive voice into active voice. The suffering endured passively by Kierkegaard's sisters and their children, by Kierkegaard himself and the members of his family, becomes active in Abraham's raised knife. It is Abraham who, at God's command, cuts the tie between parent and child.[28] Likewise, it was Kierkegaard who, in the wake of this overload of loss and mourning, severed the tie with Regine. Guilty, not guilty? A difficult question indeed. Suffering turns to sacrifice, an attempt to move beyond the realm of finitude, where losses can only be passively suffered.

What, then, was the peril repeatedly raised in the weaning narratives, the peril alluded to in the lines "fortunate the child who has not lost its mother in some other way" and "how fortunate the one who has this stronger sustenance at hand." Was this a reference to death and separation? Or was the stronger sustenance a language capable of obviating misunderstanding. A language capable of explaining suffering and setting it right. A poet no longer living in an unhappy alliance with the ever unattainable hero, Hegel's unhappy consciousness. A poet, rather, capable of consuming his hero, or vice versa, leaving no troubling questions behind, no wisp of doubt about the difference between faith and murder. The peril is that no such language exists. The very nature of human language is that its meanings wander, there is no such thing as direct or immediate reference, no direct communication, no signifier or gesture which collapses, without remainder, into its signified (hence Kierkegaard's pronouncements concerning indirect communication can be more understood as a meditation on the very nature of language than a call for a certain technique of communication called indirect).

In the Tribute to Abraham, de Silentio's thoughts pass, interestingly, to the question of the meaning of existence:

> If there were no eternal consciousness in a man, if at the foundation of all there lay only a wildly seething power which writhing with obscure passions

[28] Cathy Caruth, in her arresting reading of Ariel Dorfmann's *Death and the Maiden*, pairs the "missed moment" in which the victim of torture vanishes as agent and awakens to the reality of this unimaginable loss. The victim's attempt to recover the "missed" moment of domination risks taking on a quality which de Silentio or Haufniensis would call demonic, the lone pursuit of reversal of domination, "achievable" only through the immolation of subjectivity, or in other words not at all. Caruth (2013), ch. 4, pp. 54–74. I am grateful to both Cathy and Sara Beardsworth for their work on the legacy of torture. See Beardsworth (2013).

> produced everything that is great and everything that is insignificant, if a bottomless void never satiated lay hidden beneath all – what then would life be but despair? If such were the case, if there were no sacred bond which united mankind, if one generation arose after another like the leafage in the forest, if the one generation replaced the other like the song of birds in the forest, if the human race passed through the world as the ship goes through the sea, like the wind through the desert, a thoughtless and fruitless activity, if an eternal oblivion were always lurking hungrily for its prey and there was no power strong enough to wrest it from its maw – how empty then and comfortless life would be![29]

The next line is: "But precisely for this reason, it is not so, and just as God created man and woman, so he created the hero and the poet."[30] There is little doubt that Kierkegaard's poet speaks directly from the wounds of loss, to express and perhaps to heal precisely these wounds. But if the poet's attempt is to capture and recuperate loss, we may well imagine that the valiant attempt will fail. Abraham and his faith slip away from de Silentio's words, Abraham's faith eludes de Silentio himself, etc. The task which the poet sets himself is impossible, a fact which is wonderfully illustrated by the proliferation of pseudonyms and alter egos in Kierkegaard's writings. In work after pseudonymous work, a hero eludes capture by his poet, be the text in question "From the Papers of One Still Living" with its two doppelgänger writers, Socrates and his poet Plato as depicted in *The Concept of Irony*, the poet A and Don Giovanni in *Either/Or*, de Silentio and Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*, Constantin and the young man in *Repetition*, Haufniensis and the moment of freedom/fall in *The Concept of Anxiety*, Climacus and the moment of conversion in *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, etc. In each case an impossible first immediacy or a desired second immediacy slips away. Does this indicate a failure on Kierkegaard's part, an obsessive unending attempt to scale Moriah?

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra emphasizes the way in which "the verbalization of the traumatic imprint and the perhaps 'sacrilegious' variations played on it may be necessary for a traumatized person's recovery."[31] In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard walks us to the edge of what he found bearable; this is what he offers us – not an inside track to knighthood's suspension of the ethical. What heals the traumatized, according to LaCapra, is the empathy of others, their ability to share

[29] FT 15/SKS 4, 112.
[30] Jack Caputo highlights the gratuitous nature of de Silentio's conclusion. Caputo (1993), pp. 15–16.
[31] LaCapra (2007), p. 107n.

in the distress and unsettled vision of the traumatized. We have this ability, perhaps, because we have all been weaned, we have all passed through the precipitous sea change of weaning from the first intimacy. Perhaps we should revisit our earlier claim about the clear distinction between a "natural" weaning and the shock of extraordinary trauma. Perhaps they are different, but are they different in kind? Is the first not the precondition of the second? In Cathy Caruth's words, Freud moves from an explanation of "trauma as an exception, an accident that takes consciousness by surprise and thus disrupts it, to trauma as the very origin of consciousness and all of life itself."[32] If we are lucky enough to have been spared the particular fate of the Kierkegaard's, we all know that some of life's events cannot be explained, not in this life, and perhaps not at all. In Alastair Hannay's wise and muted terms, a life-view (an overriding view capable of setting all individual occurrences into perspective) represents a sort of certainty "whose *absence* it is rather the lot of the adult to feel."[33] We can feel the jolt of Kierkegaard's sister's weanings, the wrenching deaths of the mothers, the horrible emptiness felt by the surviving children, because we are ourselves no longer inhabitants of Eden. In this respect, we might say that *Fear and Trembling* succeeds by asking something more of us than to don, once again, our intellectual regalia. We are called to respond to him, to enter intimately into his plight, to the vertiginous prospect of meaninglessness which it opens up. To accompany Abraham, Kierkegaard, and one another.

[32] Caruth (1996), p. 104. [33] Hannay (2001), p. 110.

Bibliography

Adams, R. 1990. "The knight of faith." *Faith and Philosophy* **7**: pp. 383–95.

Adams, S. L. and C. R. Lundquist, eds. 2013. *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Mothering*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Agacinksi, S. 1998. "We are not sublime: love and sacrifice, Abraham and ourselves." In *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. J. Rée, J. Chamberlain. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 129–50.

Akenson, D. H. 1998. *Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds*. University of Chicago Press.

Anscombe, E. 1958. "Modern moral philosophy." *Philosophy* **33**: 1–19.

Beardsworth, S. 2013. "The trauma of torture: the missing affect and the disappearance of torturers." Lecture presented at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, November 13.

Benor, E. 1996. *Worship of the Heart: A Study of Maimonides' Philosophy of Religion*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Berlin, A. and M. Z. Brettler, eds. 2004. *The Jewish Study Bible*. Oxford University Press.

Bernier, M. 2015. *The Task of Hope in Kierkegaard*. Oxford University Press.

Biale, D. 1982. "The god with breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible." *History of Religions* **21**: pp. 240–56.

Blanshard, B. 1969. "Kierkegaard on faith." In *Essays on Kierkegaard*, ed. J. H. Gill. Minneapolis, MN: Burgess, pp. 113–26.

Blanchette, O. 1993. "The silencing of philosophy." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary:* Fear and Trembling *and* Repetition, ed. R. L. Perkins. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, pp. 29–65.

Boehm, O. 2007. *The Binding of Isaac*. New York: T&T Clark.

Brentano, F. 1996. *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A. C. Racurello and D. B. Terrell, ed. O. Kraus and L. McAlister. London: Routledge.

Brewster, T. 2011. *The Retrieval of Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

Bykhovskii, B. 1976. *Kierkegaard*, trans. H. F. Mins. Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner.

Caputo, J. 1993. *Against Ethics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Carlisle, C. 2005. *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

2010. *Kierkegaard's* Fear and Trembling*: A Reader's Guide*. London: Continuum.

Caruth, C. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

2013. *Literature in the Ashes of History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cavarero, A. 1995. *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Reading of Ancient Philosophy*. London: Routledge.

Conway, D. 2002. "The confessional drama of *Fear and Trembling*." In *Critical Assessments of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. D. Conway. vol. III. London: Routledge, pp. 87–103.

2003. "'Seeing' is believing: Narrative visualization in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*." *Journal of Textual Reasoning* **2**.

2008. "Abraham's final word." In *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements*, ed. E. Mooney. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 175–95.

2013. "Recognition and its discontents: Johannes *de silentio* and the preacher." In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 25–48.

Cooper, J. M. 1999. *Reason and Emotion*. Princeton University Press.

Cunningham, C. 2013. "Nihilism and theology: who stands at the door?" In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern European Theology*, ed. N. Adams, G. Pattison, and G. Ward. Oxford University Press, pp. 325–43.

Dalrymple, T. 2010. "Abraham: framing Fear and Trembling." In *Kierkegaard and the Bible: The Old Testament*, ed. L. Barrett and J. Stewart. London: Ashgate.

Davenport, J. 1996. "The essence of eschatology: A modal interpretation." *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* **19**: pp. 206–39.

2002. "Eschatological ultimacy and the best possible hereafter." *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* **25**: pp. 36–67.

2003. "Happy endings and religious hope." In *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*, ed. G. Bassham and E. Bronson. Chicago: Open Court, pp. 204–18.

2008a. "Faith as eschatological trust in *Fear and Trembling*." In *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements*, ed. E. Mooney. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 196–233.

2008b. "Kierkegaard's *Postcript* in light of *Fear and Trembling*." *Revista Portuguesa De Filosofia* **64**: pp. 879–908.

2008c. "What Kierkegaardian faith adds to the alterity ethics: How Levinas and Derrida miss the eschatalogical dimension." In *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, ed. J. A. Simmons and D. Wood. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 169–98.

2012. *Narrative, Identity, Autonomy, and Morality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard*. London: Routledge.

Davenport, J. and A. Rudd. 2001. *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*. Chicago: Open Court.

Derrida, J. 1995. *The Gift of Death*, trans. D. Wills. University of Chicago Press.

Drucker, P. F. 1949. "The unfashionable Kierkegaard." *Sewanee Review* **57**: 587–602.

Ellsworth, P. C. 2003. "Confusion, concentration, and other emotions of interest." *Emotion* **3**: 81–85.
Emmanuel, S. M. 1996. *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
Evans, C. S. 1996. *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
2004. *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*. Oxford University Press.
2006. *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.
2009. *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
Ferreira, J. M. 1991. *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith*. Oxford: Clarendon.
Fichte, I. H. 1833–46. *Grundzüge zum System der Philosophie*. Heidelberg: J.C.B. Mohr.
1834. *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen Fortdauer*. Elberfeld.
Fox, M. 1953. "Kierkegaard and rabbinic Judaism." *Judaism* **2**: pp. 160–69.
Frankfurt, H. G. 2004. *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton University Press.
Fremstedal, R. 2011. "Kierkegaard's double movement of faith and Kant's moral faith." *Religious Studies* **48**: pp. 199–220.
Furtak, R. A. 2005. *Wisdom in Love*. University of Notre Dame Press.
Gardiner, P. 2002. *Kierkegaard: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
Garff, J. 2000. *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. B. Kirmmse. Princeton University Press.
Gellman, J. 1994. *The Fear, the Trembling, and the Fire: Kierkegaard and Hasidic Masters on the Binding of Isaac*. Washington: University Press of America.
2003. *Abraham! Abraham! Kierkegaard and the Hasidim on the Binding of Isaac*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
Gill, J. H. 1981. "Faith is as faith does." In *Kierkegaard's* Fear and Trembling*: Critical Appraisals*, ed. R. L. Perkins. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, pp. 204–17.
Ginzberg, L. 1925. *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. H. Szold. 7 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
Goldie, P. 2000. *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Goodman, L. E. 1996. *God of Abraham*. Oxford University Press.
Gouwens, D. J. 1996. *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*. Cambridge University Press.
Green, R. M. 1982. "Abraham, Isaac, and the Jewish tradition: An ethical reappraisal." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* **10**: pp. 1–21.
1986. "Deciphering *Fear and Trembling*'s hidden message." *Religious Studies* **26**: pp. 95–111.
1988. *Reason and Moral Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
1992. *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

1993. "Enough is enough! *Fear and Trembling* is *not* about ethics." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* **21**: pp. 191–209.
1998. "'Developing' *Fear and Trembling*." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. A. Hannay and G. D. Marino. Cambridge University Press, pp. 257–81.
2011. *Kant and Kierkegaard on Time and Eternity*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.
Gregor, B. 2005. "Selfhood and the three R's: Reference, repetition, and refiguration." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* **58**: pp. 63–94.
Halevi, J. L. 1955. "Kierkegaard and the Midrash." *Judaism* **4**: pp. 13–28.
Halivni, D. W. 1986. *Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara: The Jewish Predilection for Justified Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Hall, A. L. 2002. *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love*. Cambridge University Press.
Hall, R. L. 1999. *The Human Embrace: The Love of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Love: Kierkegaard, Cavell, and Nussbaum*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.
Halperin, D. 1989. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*. London: Routledge.
Hampson, D. 2013. *Kierkegaard: Exposition and Critique*. Oxford University Press.
Hannay, A. 1999. *Kierkegaard (The Arguments of the Philosophers)*, new edition. London: Routledge.
2001. *Kierkegaard: A Biography*. Cambridge University Press.
2006. *Kierkegaard and Philosophy: Selected Essays*. New York: Routledge.
2008. "Silence and entering the circle of faith." In *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. E. Mooney. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 234–43.
Hanson, J. 2011. "The shipwreck of the aesthetic and ethical." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* **32**: pp. 371–405.
Hegel, G. W. F. 1971a. *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox and R. Korner. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
1971b. *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press.
1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford University Press.
1991. *The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. T. F. Gerats, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
Hoffman, K. 2006. "Facing threats to earthly felicity: A reading of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* **34**: pp. 439–59.
Houseman, A. E. 1958. *The Collected Poems of A.E. Houseman*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
Howland, J. 2011. *Plato and the Talmud*. Cambridge University Press.
Hume, D. 1998. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. R. H. Popkin, 2nd edn. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
Ignatius of Loyola. 1991. *Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. G. E. Ganss, SJ. New York: Paulist Press.

Irigaray, L. 1993. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. C. Burke and G. C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

James, W. 1990. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Vintage Books/ Library of America.

Janouch, G. 1971. *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. G. Rees, 2nd edn. New York: New Directions.

Jaspers, K. 1955. *Reason and Existenz: Five Lectures*. New York: Noonday Press.

JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. 1999. 2nd edn. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Kangas, D. 2001. "The logic of gift in Kierkegaard's Four Upbuilding Discourses (1843)." In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*. Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 100–20.

Kant, I. 1965. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith. London: St. Martin's Press.

1996a. "The conflict of the faculties." In *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. A. W. Wood, ed. A. W. Wood. Cambridge University Press, pp. 233–328.

1996b. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

1998. *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. and ed. A. Wood, G. Giovanni. Cambridge University Press.

Katz, C. 2003. *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

2005. "The responsibility of irresponsibility: Taking (yet) another look at the akedah." In *Addressing Levinas*, ed. E. S. Nelson, A. Kapust, and K. Still. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, pp. 17–33

Kaufmann, W. 1975. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. New York: Meridian Books.

1980. *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*. Princeton University Press.

Keeley, L. C. 1993. "The parables of problem III in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary:* Fear and Trembling *and* Repetition, ed. R. L. Perkins. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, pp. 127–54.

Kemp, R. 2013. "In Defense of a Straightforward Reading of *Fear and Trembling*." *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* **1**: pp. 49–70.

Kessler, E. 2004. "Bound by the bible: Jews, Christians, and the binding of Isaac." In *Two Faiths, One Covenant? Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, ed. E. B. Korn and J. T. Pawlikowski. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 11–28.

Kierkegaard, S. 1967. *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton University Press.

1983. *Fear and Trembling*, trans. E. Hong and H. Hong. Princeton University Press.

1985. *Fear and Trembling*, trans. A. Hannay. London: Penguin Classics.

1987. *Either/Or, Part One*, trans. E. Hong and H. Hong. Princeton University Press.

1989. *Sickness Unto Death*, trans. A Hannay. London: Penguin Books.

2004. *Either/Or: A Fragment of a Life*, trans. A. Hannay. London: Penguin Books.

2006a. *Fear and Trembling*. Penguin Great Ideas edn., trans. A. Hannay. London: Penguin Books.
2006b. *Fear and Trembling*, ed. C. S. Evans and S. Walsh, trans. S. Walsh. Cambridge University Press.
2009a. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. and ed. A. Hannay. Cambridge University Press.
2009b. *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. M. H. Piety. Oxford University Press.
Kirmmse, B., ed. 1998. *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life Seen by His Contemporaries*, trans. V. Laursen and B. Kirmmse. Princeton University Press.
Kosch, M. 2008. "What Abraham couldn't say." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary volume, pp. 59–78.
Krishek, S. 2009. *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*. Cambridge University Press.
Krishek, S. and R. A. Furtak. 2012. "A cure for worry?: A Kierkegaardian faith and the insecurity of human existence." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* **72**: pp. 157–75.
LaCapra, D. 2007. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Laub, D. 2013. "Reestablishing the internal 'Thou' in testimony of trauma." *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Trauma* **18**: pp. 184–98.
Lear, J. 2006. *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Leon, C. and S. Walsh, eds. 1997. *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.
Levenson, J. D. 2012. *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton University Press.
Levinas, E. 1996. "A propos of 'Kierkegaard vivant'." In *Proper Names*, ed. M. B. Smith. Stanford University Press, pp. 75–79.
Lev-Kenaan, V. and H. Kenaan. 2001. "Eros in Plato's Symposium." In *Plato's Symposium*, ed. M. Finkelberg. Tel Aviv: Hargol.
Lindau, H., ed. 1912. *Die Schriften zu J. G. Fichte's Atheismus-Streit*. Munich: G. Müller.
Lippitt, J. 2003. *The Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Kierkegaard and* Fear and Trembling. London: Routledge.
2007."Getting the story straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and some problems with narrative unity." *Inquiry* **50**: pp. 34–69.
2013. *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-love*. Cambridge University Press.
Lowrie, W. 1938. *Kierkegaard*. 2 vols. Oxford University Press.
Luther, M. 1957. *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. J. Packer and O. R. Johnston. Grand Rapids, MI: James Clark.
1964. *Luther's works: Lectures on GENESIS Chapters 21–25*, trans. G. Schick, ed. J. Pelikan. Vol. 4. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.
MacIntyre, A. 2001. "Once more on Kierkegaard." In *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre*, ed. J. Davenport and A. Rudd. Chicago: Open Court, pp. 339–56.
2007. *After Virtue*, 3rd edn. University of Notre Dame Press.

Mackey, L. 1986. *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard*. Tallahassee, FL: University Presses of Florida.

Macquarrie, J. 1978. *Christian Hope*. Oxford: Mowbray.

Maimonides, M. 1963. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines. University of Chicago Press.

Malesic, J. 2013. "The paralyzing instant: Shifting vocabularies about time and ethics in *Fear and Trembling*." *Journal of Religious Ethics* **41**: pp. 209–32.

Manguel, R. 1997. *A History of Reading*. New York: Penguin Books.

Martensen, H.L. 1839. "Rationalisme, Supranaturalisme og *principium exclusi medii* I Anledning af H. H. Biskop Mynsters Afhandling herom I dette Tidsskrifts forrige Hefte." *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, vol. 1, trans. J. Stewart.

1881. *Special Part 1: Individual Ethics. Christian Ethics*, trans. W. Affleck. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

1882. *Special Part 2: Social Ethics. Christian Ethics*, trans. S. Taylor. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

1890. *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. W. Urwick. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

1973. *Christian Ethics: General Part*, trans. C. Spence. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

1997. "The autonomy of human self-consciousness in modern dogmatic theology." In *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. and ed. C. J. Thompson and D. Kangas. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, pp. 73–148.

Mavrodes, G. 1988. *Revelation in Religious Belief*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

McDonald, W. 2014. "Hope." In *Kierkegaard's Concepts: Envy to Incognito*, ed. S. Emmanuel, W. McDonald, and J. Stewart. Vol. 15, Tome III. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 163–68.

Midrash Rabbah. 1983. Ed. H. Freedman and M. Simon. 3rd edn. London: Soncino Press.

Milbank, J. 1996. "The sublime in Kierkegaard." *Heythrop Journal* **37**: pp. 298–321.

Mooney, E. 1987. "Gender, philosophy, and the novel." *Metaphilosophy* **18**: pp. 241–52.

1991. *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's* Fear and Trembling. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

1996. *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-religious Psychology from* Either/Or *to* Sickness Unto Death. New York: Routledge.

2007. *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

2008. *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: A Philosophical Engagement*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

2011. "Julia Kristeva: Tales of love and horror." In *Kierkegaard: Influences on the Social Sciences*, ed. J. Stewart. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 177–93.

2012. *Excursions with Kierkegaard: Others, Goods, Death, and Final Faith*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

2013. "Dependence and its discontents: Kierkegaard on being sustained by another." *Modern Language Notes* **128**: pp. 1–23.
Moran, R. 2001. *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-knowledge*. Princeton University Press.
Mulder, J. 2010. *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition: Conflict and Dialogue*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
Mulhall, S. 2001. *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*. Oxford University Press.
Murdoch, I. 1970. *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge.
Mynster, J. P. 1839. "De principio logico exclusi medii. . .," *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*. Vol. 7. Trans J. Stewart.
Nussbaum, M. 2001. *Upheavals of Thought*. Cambridge University Press.
O'Byrne, A. 2010. *Natality and Finitude*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Otto, R. 1958. *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. J. W. Harvey. New York: Oxford University Press.
Pattison, G. 2012. *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century: The Paradox and the 'Point of Contact'*. Cambridge University Press.
Pattison, G. and H. M. Jensen. 2012. *Kierkegaard's Pastoral Dialogues*. Eugene, OR: Cascade.
Perkins, R. L. 1993. "Abraham's silence aesthetically considered." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, pp. 155–76.
Philo. 1854. *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, trans. C. D. Yonge. Vol. III. London: Henry G. Bohn.
1935. "On Abraham." In *Philo*, vol. 6., trans. F. H. Colson. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.
Pickus, D. 2010. "Paperback authenticity." *Philosophy and Literature* **34**: pp. 17–31.
Plato. 1997. "Symposium." In *Complete Writings*, ed. J. M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
Pojman, L. 2008. *Philosophy of Religion*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
Poole, R. 2002. "Towards a theory of responsible reading." In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*. Vol. 7. Berlin: de Gruyter.
Proudfoot, W. 1985. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Rasmussen, A. M. 2009. "Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: Two theories of the leap." In *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions. Tome I: Philosophy*, ed. Jon Stewart. Aldershot: Ashgate.
Rich, A. 1995. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W. W. Norton.
Roberts, R. C. 1998. "Existence, emotion, and virtue." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. A. Hannay and G. Marino. Cambridge University Press, pp. 177–206.
2003a. *Emotions*. Cambridge University Press.
2003b. "The virtue of hope in Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. R. L. Perkins. Vol. V. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, pp. 181–203.

Rudd, A. 1993. *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*. Oxford University Press.
2012. *Self, Value, and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach*. Oxford University Press.
Rumble, V. 2007. "Christianly speaking, humanly speaking: The dynamics of leveling and mimetic desire in Kierkegaard's Christian Discourses." In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 209–26.
Sagi, Avi. 2000. *Kierkegaard, Religion, and Existence*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
Sartre, J-P. 1948. *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. P. Mairet. London: Metheun.
1985. *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Citadel Press.
Scheler, M. 1973. "Ordo amoris." In *Selected Philosophical Essays*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
Schelling, F. 1967. *The Ages of the World* [Die Weltalter], trans. F. Bolman. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 98–135.
1997. *System of transcendental idealism* [System des transzendentalen Idealismus], trans. P. Heath. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
Schleiermacher, F. 1996. *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers* [Über die Religion], trans. R. Crouter. Cambridge University Press.
2004. *Über der Religion*. Hamburg: Meiner.
Seltzer, David. 2012. "Biological imagery in *Fear and Trembling*." *Philosophy Today* **56**: pp. 333–42.
Solomon, R. C. 1993. *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*. 3rd edn. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
Søltoft, P. 2012. "The phenomenon of love." Paper presented at Kierkegaard on Love and the Passions, University of Copenhagen.
Spiegel, S. 1993. *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice: The Akedah*, trans. J. Goldin. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing.
St. Augustine. 1961. *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. London: Penguin Books.
Steinsaltz, A. 1989. *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition*. New York: Random House.
Stern, D. S. 2003. "The Bind of Responsibility: Kierkegaard, Derrida, and the Akedah of Isaac." *Philosophy Today* **47**: pp. 33–43.
Stewart, J. 2003. *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*. Cambridge University Press.
Stokes, P. 2010. "Naked subjectivity: minimal vs. narrative selves in Kierkegaard." *Inquiry* **53**: 356–82.
Stout, J. 2004. *Democracy and Tradition*. Princeton University Press.
Stump, E. 2010. *Wandering in the Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*. Oxford University Press.
Tebbutt, A. 2014. "Resignation and the 'Humble Courage of Faith' in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*." In *Interpreting Abraham: Journeys to Moriah*, ed. B. Beach and M. Powell. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing.
Tietjen, M. A. 2013. *Kierkegaard, Communication and Virtue*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Tilley, J. M. 2012. "Rereading the teleological suspension: resignation, faith, and teleology." In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. H. Schulz, J. Stewart, and K. Verstrynge. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter pp. 145–70.

Tolkien, J. R. R. "On fairy stories." 1997. In *The Monster and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. C. Tolkien. New York: Harper Collins. 1st edn. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982.

Tsakiri, V. 2006. *Kierkegaard: Anxiety, Repetition, and Contemporaneity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Unamuno, M. 1954. *The Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. J. E. Crawford Flitch. New York: Dover.

Underhill, E. *Mysticism*. 1990. New York: Doubleday/Image Books.

van Hooft, S. *Hope*. 2011. Durham, NC: Acumen.

Von Trier, L. 1996. *Breaking the Waves*. London: Faber and Faber.

Warnock, M. 1996. *Existentialism*, rev. edn. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weddle, D. *Miracles*. 2010. New York University Press.

Weinstein, P. 2005. *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Weiss, R. 2012. "Hinnam: The trial of Job and Abraham and the limits of divine omniscience." Paper presented at Shalom Center conference on "Philosophical Investigation of the Hebrew Scriptures, Talmud, and Midrash." Jerusalem.

Westphal, M. 2014. *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing.

Wettstein, H. 2012. *The Significance of Religious Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Williams, L. 1998. "Kierkegaard's weanings." *Philosophy Today* **42**: pp. 310–18.

Zornberg, A. G. 1995. *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*. New York: Shocken Books.

Index